

PURITY

OF

CHRISTIAN COMMUNION

RECOMMENDED

AS AN ANTIDOTE AGAINST

The Perils of the Latter Days,

IN THREE DISCOURSES,

Delivered to a Church of Christ in Richmond Court,

EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING SOME THOUGHTS

ON THE WEEKLY CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER,

AND ON THE NATURE AND TENDENCY OF

Human Standards of Religion.

Therefore brethren, stand fast, and hold THE TRADITIONS WHICH YE HAVE
BEEN TAUGHT, whether by word, or our Epistle. 2 THESS. ii. 15.

EDINBURGH;

PRINTED for J. GUTHRIE, Nicolson's Street, and sold by him, J. ROBERT-
SON, and J. OGLE, Edinburgh; J. and A. DUNCAN, and D. NIVEN,
Glasgow; T. CHAPMAN, and J. MURGATROYD, London; and
by the Bookfellers in Perth, Dundee, Paisley, &c.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following discourses have no connection with any *political* cause of alarm. The author, and the people among whom he officiates as one of their ELDERS, form a just estimate of the value of CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. They are sufficiently aware of every thing that endangers *the latter* in particular, and reckon themselves entitled, on necessary and urgent occasions, to plead those privileges which are secured to them by the laws of their country; as was frequently done with success by the Apostle Paul*. But their principles do not permit them, *in any supposable case*, to resist THE CIVIL POWERS by violent means, to join any *association* in opposition to GOVERNMENT, or to give countenance, in any respect, to that turbulent spirit which tends to produce anarchy and mischief. Their inclination corresponds with an object which the Scripture teaches them to have in view, in offering up to God “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for KINGS, and for all that are in authority;” namely, “*that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty*†.” When

* Acts xvi. 37, 38, 39. and xxi. 39, 40. and xxii. 24,—30. and xxv. 9,—13.

† 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

the just and beneficent conduct of RULERS gives them an opportunity to live in peace, they enjoy it with thankfulness; and if at any time it should be otherwise, they would submit to the inconveniences that might arise from this, without approving of the measures which had occasioned them. They yield subjection to THE POWERS THAT ARE, whatever characters they may sustain; not from the motives of slavish fear, or worldly ambition, but in obedience to AN EXPRESS COMMANDMENT OF THE GOD OF HEAVEN, and from a deep conviction that subordination among men is beneficial to all ranks in society, and essential to the existence of society itself*.

The Discourses relate solely to a Kingdom which is "not of this world." Its *subjects* are those who "are of THE TRUTH, and hear CHRIST's voice†;" its *blessings*, which they alone enjoy, are of a spiritual and heavenly nature‡; its *laws* are written in the hearts of men by THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD, and regulate the state of their minds, as well as their external conduct||; its *rewards*, and its *punishments* have all a reference to THE LIFE TO COME§; and its *interests* cannot be promoted or defended, on the part of those who espouse them, by any violent means whatever. One of those perpetual and irreversible decrees by which it is governed, is this, "*He that leadeth into captivity, shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword, must be killed with the sword.*" HERE IS THE PATIENCE AND

* Rom. xiii. 1,—8.

† John xviii. 36, 37.

‡ Eph. i. 3.

|| Heb. viii. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 3.

§ John v. 28, 29.

THE FAITH OF THE SAINTS*." Does such a kingdom exist in this sinful world, unaided by the power of man, enduring always his contempt, and sometimes the most violent effects of his malignant rage? who then would scruple to affirm that it is in reality THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

The subjects treated of in this work, have lately occupied the attention of Christians of various denominations, in a more than usual degree; which induces the author to hope that it may be acceptable and useful to some, who are beginning to free themselves from the shackles of human authority in matters of religion, and to search the Scriptures with unbiassed minds. And though it should meet with a very opposite reception from others, who are wedded to human systems of divinity, or interested in their support, he will not be greatly disappointed. Such persons, and all who may be disposed, on whatever ground, to censure the doctrine contained in the Discourses, are requested to observe, that it can only be refuted by THE WORD OF GOD; because it totally disavows *every other standard*. Any candid person, therefore, who may attempt to disprove it, will reckon himself bound to shew that it contradicts the doctrine of the New Testament; unless he fairly deny the Divine authority of that book. The author considers the cause in which he is engaged as THE CAUSE OF THE MOST HIGH, whatever imperfection there may be in this attempt to defend it; and to HIM he com-

* Rev. xiii. 10.

mits this cause, in the assured confidence that it will at last prevail over all opposition. For "the kingdoms of this world," the far greater part of whom are at present Antichristian worshippers, or Pagan Idolaters, will "become THE KINGDOM OF OUR LORD, AND OF HIS CHRIST, and HE shall reign for ever and ever*."

* Rev. xi. 15.

EDINBURGH, 8th July 1796.

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PURITY

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CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

FIRST DISCOURSE.

2 TIM. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, beady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

THE Apostle describes in this passage a dreadful corruption of Christianity, which is foretold in many other parts of the Word of God, particularly the Book of Daniel, and the Revelation of John. It began in some degree, in the first age of Christianity; for this Apostle says, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work*;" and the Apostle John speaks in the same way, "As ye have heard," says he, "that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists†." This accounts for the cautions frequently given to Christians who then lived, examples of which we have in this and the following chapter. These words, "From such turn away," were addressed in the first in-

* 2 Thef. ii. 7.

† 1 John ii. 18.

stance to Timothy, and to all his co-temporaries, who loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth; for a warning is immediately given, respecting corrupt and deceitful men, who, at that time, committed iniquity under the mask of godliness*. Timothy is referred to the practice of the Apostle, as an example for him to imitate†; and to the holy Scriptures, which he had known from his childhood, and which were able to make him wise unto salvation‡, that he might be preserved from the influence of such men. And he is charged in the most solemn manner, “Before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom; to preach the word, to be instant in season, out of season, &c. ||” in order to preserve the disciples of Christ from this growing evil: for he affirms that “Evil men and seducers, would wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived**;” that “The time would come, when professors of the faith would heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and ~~that~~ they would turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables††.” Paul, however, in this, and other parts of his writings, chiefly refers to a future period of time, when apostasy from the faith, and its genuine influence, was to become far more general than it had been in his day, and a false profession of Christianity was extensively, and fatally to prevail, under the influence of human authority, and the power of the Man of Sin.

The perilous times, foretold by the Apostle, were to come *in the last days*; which is an epithet frequently applied, both in the Old and New Testament, to the whole of the Gospel dispensation; and sometimes to the latter part of that period, wherein “God hath spoken to us by his Son†.” Thus, in another prophetic account of the same melancholy subject, that now occupies our attention, it is said, “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that *in the latter times* some

* 2 Tim. iii. 6.

† Ver. 10, 11.

‡ Ver. 14, 15, 16, 17.

|| Chap. iv. 1, 2.

** Chap. iii. 13.

†† Chap. iv. 3, 4.

† Heb. i. 2.

shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, &c."* Several of the things predicted in this passage, were not accomplished till a considerable time after the apostolic age. Peter, also speaks of "Scoffers, who would come *in the last days*, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming†?" which appears evidently to refer to the time of Antichrist's reign, and particularly the concluding part of it, when the daring impiety of ungodly scoffers seems to increase, in proportion as their inevitable destruction draws nigh. Jude foretels the coming of these mockers *in the last time*, and speaks of it as a thing well known to Christians, who received this warning on many occasions from the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ‡. If then we are persuaded, that Antichrist has long ago come, that the Man of Sin, agreeable to the prediction of Paul, has been revealed, and that, however much he is already "consumed by the Spirit of the Lord's mouth," he is not yet finally "destroyed by the brightness of his coming;" we must be fully convinced, that the days in which we live, are the perilous times of which the Spirit of God hath expressly spoken. Will not this momentuous consideration induce us to attend to the means of safety, which are also clearly pointed out to us in the word of God?

WITH a view to establish those of you, who have already separated from unscriptural churches, and to convince others, who may be insensible to the dangers which surround them, or who, amidst many convictions, neglect this solemn call, "From such turn away." I shall,

I. Enquire what sort of characters those men possess, from whom we are commanded to turn away; and what danger is to be apprehended from them.

II. Illustrate, and enforce the commandment, to turn away from men who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.

* 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3.

† 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, 10.

‡ Jude ver. 17, 18.

III. Make some remarks on its extent and its consequences. And,

LASTLY, conclude with a few practical observations.

I. WITH respect to the characters of those men, from whom we are commanded to turn away, it does not seem necessary to explain the various epithets here given to them by the Apostle. The meaning of these is sufficiently understood, especially when we apply them to other people, and not to ourselves; for all of us have some degree of that criminal selfishness, which is too apt, on many occasions, to make us palliate in ourselves, that which we see at once to be a crime in others. The object in view, and which is most essential in the present enquiry, is to determine to what general class, or description of men, those characters belong, which are mentioned in this passage. It will be easily perceived, that Paul is not here treating merely of the wickedness of all men in their natural state, as he does in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; for men were always lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, &c. These characters universally abounded at the time in which the Apostle lived, excepting only among those who were "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*." Wherein then consists the singularity of what is affirmed in this passage, concerning the prevalence of wicked characters, without which, no remarkable or imminent danger could arise to the followers of Christ, nor could the Apostle's words be at all considered as prophetic?

An explanation of this is given in ver. 5, where the Apostle sums up the characters he had described in the foregoing verses, in these words, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Those wicked men, therefore, against whose influence he cautions the true fearers of God, were to be professors of Christianity; nominal professors indeed, and that of the most unworthy kind; yet not merely such as would call themselves Christians. They

* 1 Cor. vi. 11.

were to assume, in some respects, the appearance of the followers of the Lamb, otherwise they could not be said to have "a form of godliness," nor would the Apostle have represented the times in which they were to appear, as "perilous times" to the genuine professors of Christianity; who, on this supposition, would have been in no danger of being deceived by them. He does not, however, ascribe to them, *the* approved form of godliness, which is enjoined and exemplified in the New Testament; but *a* form, which when examined, will be found to be in many respects, of their own invention.

It will further appear, that the Apostle, in this shocking enumeration of crimes, does not describe the wickedness of mere heathens, or those entirely ignorant of the Gospel doctrine; when you consider that the same persons are said, ver. 8, to resist the truth, not in an open and avowed manner, as professed infidels always did, but as Jannes and Jambres (by whom are meant the magicians in Egypt, these two names being known to the Apostle, either by tradition, or by immediate revelation,) withstood Moses, by performing, or seeming to perform some of his miracles*. They did not dispute the reality of those miraculous works which he performed in their presence. They wished only to shew, that their own power or dexterity was equal to his; and if in this they had succeeded, they would have been equally entitled, to be considered as messengers from the Deity, who were empowered to declare his will. In like manner, there were in the first age of Christianity, "false apostles, deceitful workers, the ministers of Satan, who transformed themselves into the ministers of righteousness," as Satan himself, the better to accomplish his malicious purposes "is transformed into an angel of light†." Men of this stamp

* Gen. vii. and viii.

† 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14, 15. There have certainly been instances of men who came fully up to this description. I do not mean, however, to insinuate in any part of these discourses, that all who corrupt the Gospel, or whose profession of faith is invalidated by their conduct, *intend* to deceive. Many who are active in disseminating the most dangerous errors, are themselves deceived; and the most implacable enemies of the people of God, who have

gradually increased in number, and in the art of deception. And in general those teachers, who, in the perilous times of the Gospel dispensation, sustain the characters mentioned in this passage, must have something favourable to recommend them to the attention of professing Christians. They put on a fair outside appearance, professing to believe the Gospel, and to be subject to the authority of Christ, assuming perhaps too, an air of uncommon sanctity and devotion, while they effectually resist the truth, by artfully undermining and perverting it; and bring the highest discredit on the doctrine which they profess to hold, by acting in direct opposition to the genuine influence of the truth; for they deny the power of godliness by the general tenor of their conduct, and are "men of corrupt minds reprobate concerning the faith*." Many of them also have resembled the magicians of Pharaoh, by performing false miracles; and in this we see the literal fulfilment of another prophecy concerning the Man of Sin. His coming is said to be "after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness in them that perish†."

Paul makes use of the following considerations also, as arguments with Timothy for incessant diligence in preaching the Word, and in reproof, rebuking, and exhorting, with all long suffering and doctrine; "for," says he, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears‡, &c." These teachers, as well as the people

persecuted them even unto death, have thought that this was "doing God service*" But pernicious doctrine has the same effect on those who receive it, whether their teachers are honest men or deceivers; and there is in general a want of fairness and candour in the methods that are taken to establish false doctrine, a handling of the word of God deceitfully, and a fearless perversion of it, even when those who do so are honestly persuaded of the truth of their own system. This may account for so many things being said in the scripture about the "cunning craftiness" of false teachers, who are represented as "lying in wait to deceive†."

* Jo. xvi. 2.

† Eph. iv. 14.

* 2 Tim. iii. 8.

† 2 Thes. ii. 9, 10.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3, 4.

who chused their delusions, must have been Christians by profession ; for all this wickedness was to take its rise in those very churches, in which Timothy and other faithful servants of Christ then laboured, agreeable to what Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, " Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them *." The Scripture abounds with prophecies concerning these false teachers, who are represented as bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them † ; covetous men who would make merchandize of their flocks ‡ ; grossly impure and immoral in their conduct || ; presumptuous, self-willed, full of pride and lordly dominion, and impatient of every restraint both human and divine ; for it is also affirmed of them, that they despise government, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities **. Some of them were to inculcate, and exemplify an irrational kind of austerity and mortification to the world, not commanded in the word of God, with a view to obtain a high reputation for sanctity ; while they were at the same time to trample with disdain on many of the commandments of Jesus Christ ††. Another striking part of their character is deceit. " They *privily* shall bring in damnable heresies ††. *With feigned words* shall they make merchandize of you. *Beguiling* unstable souls|||. They allure through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error *. *With good words, and fair speeches*, they deceive the hearts of the simple ††. They *creep* into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, &c. ††" And our Lord says, " Beware of false prophets, for they come to you in sheeps cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits ||†." How astonishing is it, that such a sink of wickedness should ever have been considered by rational men, and especially by professing Chris-

* Acts xx. 30. † 2 Pet. ii. 1. ‡ Ver. 3. 15. || Ver. 10, 12, 13, 14, 18. to the end. Ep. of Jude. ** 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude ver. 8.
 †† 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3. †† 2 Pet. ii. 1. || Ver. 14. * Ver. 18.
 †† Rom. xvi. 18. †† 2 Tim. iii. 6. ||† Mat. vii. 15, 16.

tians, as having any connection with the holy Gospel of the blessed God, merely because men thus loaded with crimes have impiously dared to call themselves Christians!

A slight attention to the conduct of those nations where Christianity is professed, will convince every impartial enquirer, that many of their teachers and people are described with justice and precision, in the prophetic Scriptures which have been mentioned, and in other parts of the Word of God. The description, at least in some of its leading features, does not apply to a few individuals in any one nation, or at one particular period only, but to the far greater part of every nation of professing Christians, during many successive ages. I own indeed, that the pre-eminence in all manner of iniquity is due to the Romish Church; that she is "*Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth**," and that the bishop of Rome is eminently, though not exclusively, "*The Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition*, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped†." But alas! it cannot be denied that in our own country, both in the national church, and among various classes of dissenters, multitudes of those who assume the Christian name, and have a *form* of godliness, are "lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, unholy, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;" and thus deny *the power* of godliness. Some indeed have thrown off the mask, and avowed themselves infidels; but the generality are still in some sort professors of Christ's religion, and a very great number of persons who partake of the most solemn ordinances, sustain one or other of those characters, on account of which the last days are denominated perilous times. These observations are not dictated by the narrow and envious spirit of a party; nor ought I to be suspected of such a motive, while I affirm nothing of any set of men that is not palpably and incontrovertibly true.

* Rev. xvii. 5.

† 2 Thes. ii. 4.

It will not be necessary to say a great deal more concerning the danger of these times. The short and imperfect sketch that has being given of the characters which render the times perilous, is sufficient to alarm every serious Christian, who regards the safety of his own soul, and who has any just concern for the glory of God, and the salvation of his fellow sinners. Without tracing the progress and consummation of that mystery of iniquity, which was carried on, and brought to its perfection by wicked men, under the mask of a form of godliness; I shall take the matter as it now stands, and briefly state some of the perils that arise from the false profession of Christianity, which exists at the present time.

The children of God who are intermixed with these false professors, are exposed to imminent danger. Notwithstanding all their care to avoid heterodox preachers, they frequently hear doctrine, not altogether conformable to the scripture doctrine of the Lord's free and sovereign mercy to the chief of sinners, through the atonement of Christ; which, if it does not subvert them from the faith, cannot edify their souls, and must have a tendency to keep them in bondage. They see men, with whom they walk in religious fellowship, living in sin, while they, profess to be the followers of Christ; and though they may not imitate their example in all respects, yet their connection with such men, will probably lessen their abhorrence of the crimes committed by them. "Evil communications corrupt good manners*;" and another axiom, which Paul frequently applies to the churches, is most unquestionably true in its general application, "a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump†." However little intimacy there may be between the religious and irreligious part of mixed societies, there is no manner of doubt, that their connection, such as it is, has often a baneful influence upon the former. Many of those, who make the strictest profession among them, are too much conformed to this world, in things which are credi-

* 1 Cor. xv. 33.

† 1 Cor. v. 6. Gal. v. 9.

table enough in society, but which are either expressly condemned by the law of Christ, or in their nature opposite to the spirit of the Christian profession. And in proportion as they follow the maxims and conduct of worldly men, they must lose their relish for the Gospel, and become lukewarm with respect to the things of eternal life.

They live also in the total neglect of many commandments of the Lord Jesus. They overlook altogether the ordinance of baptism, concerning which the word of God thus addresses all who repent, and believe the Gospel, "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins *." They pay no regard to the commandment in the text, "from such turn away," nor to many others of similar import. They remember the Lord's death in the ordinance of the supper, only now and then, instead of attending to it regularly every first day of the week, as the primitive Christians most certainly did †. They do not, and indeed cannot in their present situation, attend to the means which Jesus Christ hath appointed, for the recovery of brethren who offend against them ‡; while they scruple not to say to others, the most severe and uncharitable things against some of those, with whom they sit down at the table of the Lord. They yield those privileges which the members of the New Testament churches enjoyed, particularly their right to judge of the reception, and exclusion of members §; and indeed, submit to a total want of the exercise of discipline, without which the purest church on earth, (I do not here speak of a national church) would become in a very short time, a most impure and corrupt society. And as they cannot do good to the souls of others, by following out all the steps of discipline, in order to reclaim them when they go astray, so they themselves lose the immense benefit that would accrue to them from the admonitions of the brethren *. These, and many

* Acts ii. 38.

† See Appendix, No. 1.

‡ Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

§ Rom. xv. 7. 1 Cor. v. 4. to the end.

* Jas. v. 19, 20. Jude, ver. 22, 23. Heb. iii. 13, and x.—25.

other things that might be mentioned, clearly shew that the days in which a ~~firm~~ of godliness prevails without the power of it, are perilous times to the people of God.

The times that are perilous to the children of God, for the reasons that have been mentioned, cannot fail to have a hardening tendency with respect to the world at large. The corruption of the doctrine and precepts of the Gospel, which has been introduced by the Man of Sin; the superstition, idolatry, and persecuting spirit of the church of Rome, and the ungodly conduct of many who profess Christianity, in Protestant as well as Catholic countries, have contributed, more than any thing else, to render the Gospel of salvation, and the true profession of the name of Christ, completely odious to that numerous class of mankind, which may be said to have no religion. None of these things indeed, *ought* to bring any discredit on the Gospel itself, which is a doctrine according to godliness, nor on those who really believe and obey it. Nay, all that superlative degree of iniquity, which by the influence of the Man of Sin, has overspread the world, ought only to confirm us in the faith of divine revelation; for the whole of it is an exact fulfilment of what was minutely foretold in the Word of God, which also frequently warns us, in the most solemn manner, to beware of the dangers resulting from it. Yet we need not wonder that arguments have been used, or rather, that prejudices of the most inveterate kind have arisen from this, against the divine origin of the Christian faith. Avowed infidels triumph, while many, who from motives of prudence, think it best to pay some respect to the religion of their country, without believing it, are confirmed in their infidelity, and prevented from so much as giving a candid hearing to the truth and its evidence. This is one of those very things that is predicted in the word of God, concerning the perilous times of which we now speak; for Peter affirms, with respect to those false teachers who were privily to bring in damnable heresies, that "many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom," says

he, "the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*." Thus a stumbling block has been laid in the way of all men, and a more effectual mean of preventing their attention to the Gospel, has been employed by the pretended friends of divine revelation, than any that could be devised by its most determined and avowed enemies.

These times also forbode the final overthrow of the Man of Sin, "whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming†;" and of all who support his interest, by giving countenance to a false profession of Christ's name. The most awful judgments of God, both of a temporal and spiritual nature, are threatened against Antichrist, who is represented, as "speaking great words against the Most High, wearing out the saints of the Most High, and thinking to change times and laws‡." On account of his singular and highly aggravated iniquity, which entitles him to be called the *Man of Sin*, he is also denominated *the Son of Perdition*||. Some of the vials of the wrath of God have already been poured out on his devoted head; he is now in a state of langour and decay; and the time of his final perdition seems to approach. Nor will any of his adherents be in a state of safety, when the Lord comes, in the dispensations of his providence, to perform this work of judgment; for "if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of his indignation**."

II. WE shall now endeavour to illustrate and enforce the commandment in the text, "from such turn away." By this commandment, the people of God are directed to separate themselves from those ungodly professors of the Christian faith, whom the Apostle describes, in the foregoing verses; and to avoid all such connection with them, as

* 2 Pet. ii. 2.

† 2 Thess. ii. 8.

‡ Dan. vii. 25.

|| 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4.

** Rev. xiv. 9, 10.

would either tend to harden them in their iniquity, or to endanger their own safety. The law of Christ, indeed, does not prohibit Christians from civil intercourse with the world at large, or from living on friendly terms with their relations and others, who may be infidels, or false professors. On the contrary, it enjoins diligence in our worldly callings*, which necessarily leads to much intercourse with the world, and commands us to “do good to all men as we have opportunity†,” which supposes that we are intimately acquainted with the situation of other men, besides “those who are of the household of faith.” It must be admitted, however, that believers of the Gospel, when they act suitably to their profession, will principally associate with those who fear God, avoiding all unnecessary intimate correspondence with worldly men. They consider the saints as “the excellent ones of the earth, in whom is all their delight‡,” and are aware, that when they begin to have too much relish for the company and conversation of men who have their portion in this life, and still more when they prefer this to a friendly intercourse with the people of God, their souls are in danger.

In one case only, the law of Christ prohibits keeping company and eating with unbelievers. These are such unbelievers as have been excluded from the churches of Christ||; and even towards persons of this description, it is our duty to behave with affability and discretion, and to do them good when it is in our power, though all intimate correspondence with them ought to cease till they are brought to repentance. I have no objection against the opinion of those who consider the excommunication of impenitent sinners from the churches of Christ, as included in the injunction to turn away from men who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. This, however, is a distinct thing from avoiding such intimacy with them, as the Apostle makes it lawful to have, in some degree, with

* Rom. xii. 11. Eph. iv. 28. 1 Thess. iii. 12.

† Gal. vi. 10.

‡ Psal. xvi. 2.

|| 1 Cor. v. 11.

men of the worst characters, who never were connected with churches formed on the plan of the New Testament*. Both are evidently meant in our Lord's words, addressed to his Jewish disciples, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican†," and Paul in the plainest terms enjoins the former, when he says to a Gentile church, "put away from among yourselves that wicked person‡." This commandment, however, cannot be obeyed by the disciples of Christ, till they separate themselves from all strangers, and keep the ordinances, as the Apostles delivered them to the first churches.

There are others who esteem it a matter of indifference, whether they have religious fellowship or not with profane and impenitent sinners, provided they do not imitate their wicked conduct; and this they consider as the only thing intended by the Apostle when he says, "from such turn away." It is certainly of the highest consequence that we should avoid all those evils which are ascribed to corrupt professors; and if this is not the direct meaning of the Apostle, when he commands us to turn away from them, it must be strongly implied in every injunction of this nature. A mere external separation from ungodly men, will avail us nothing, if we carry along with us the same wicked practices in which they are engaged, or "if after we have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are again entangled therein and overcome ||." To follow this line of conduct, would be to strain at a gnat and to swallow a camel. It would prove us to be greater hypocrites, and more worthy of condemnation, than the persons from whom we separate. But the word of God does not suppose that we can escape all the evils which abound among corrupt professors of Christianity, while we remain in fellowship with them. Even in a church of Christ, "a root of bitterness may spring up, and trouble them, and thereby many may

* 1 Cor. v. 10.

† Mat. xviii. 17.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 13.

|| 2 Pet. ii. 20.

be defiled* ;” and some of the bad consequences arising from the other connection, have been already mentioned. It is one reason, therefore, why Christ hath instituted the law which separates his people from the world, as well as the law of discipline in the churches, that they may be preserved pure from the infection of wicked men, especially of those who “ profess to know God, and in works deny him †.” Besides, the Apostle does not merely command us to turn away from wicked conduct, but from wicked men. It is evident, that he has *persons* in his eye, when he says, from *such* turn away ; for he immediately adds, “ for of this sort are they who creep into houses, &c.”

The people of God are therefore obliged by this commandment, to come out of those religious societies which receive into their communion, men who fulfil the lusts of the flesh ; or who, if their outward conduct is decent and respectable, give the most complete evidence of their ignorance of the Gospel, and perhaps, in some cases, of their utter aversion to it. If those who enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and feel the constraining influence of his love, were not blinded by the most fatal prejudices, they would not hesitate to obey this commandment. It would appear to them a privilege, as well as a duty, to free themselves without delay, from all religious connection with men who are a dishonour to the Christian profession, and with whom they cannot have fellowship in the solemn ordinances of the Gospel, without giving countenance to the profanation of these ordinances, and exposing themselves to all the perils of the latter days.

The nature and indispensable obligation of this duty will appear from the following remarks.

1st, THERE was no outward visible distinction in the kingdom of Israel, between the true children of God, and the children of Abraham according to the flesh. The law given to that people in their national capacity, was such as

* Heb. xii. 15.

† Tit. i. 15, 16.

a nation of this world is capable to obey. It regulated only their external conduct, and a man might be a good Israelite, though he were not a believer of the promise respecting the Messiah, so as to look for redemption in Israel; for Paul could affirm, that before his conversion, he was, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*." All who in this respect were subject to its precepts, enjoyed the temporal blessings which it secured to the obedient, and were entitled to partake of all divine ordinances†. Thus far believers and unbelievers were confounded. They joined indiscriminately in the worship of the true God, for their national worship was not a human invention; it was instituted by the God of their fathers, who called Abraham from among the heathen, multiplied his seed, redeemed them from their bondage in Egypt, revealed his will to them by Moses, and put them in possession of the promised land.

But there was a line of separation, or a middle wall of partition, as the Apostle calls it, between them and the Gentile nations‡. They were prohibited, under the most severe penalties, from joining in the worship of the heathen, from intermarrying, or having any affinity with them, and from adopting their customs, or imitating their conduct, in a variety of particulars||. From the worship of the tabernacle and temple, the heathen nations were entirely excluded, except such of them as became proselytes to the Jewish religion; and these last were only admitted as worshippers in the outer court. The Gentiles were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*"; while to the Israelites alone pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises††." Such a regimen too was appointed with respect to their food, as rendered it impossible for them to have fa-

* Phil. iii. 6.

† Lev. xxvii. 3,—13. Deut. xxviii. 1,—15.

‡ Eph. ii. 14, 15.

§ Exod. xxiii. 32, 33. and xxxiv. 12,—18.

Deut. vii. 1,—6, and xviii. 9,—15.

* Eph. ii. 12.

†† Rom. ix. 4.

miliar intercourse with the nations around them, many of those animals which were the common food of the Gentiles being made unclean to them by the law of Moses *. On all these accounts, they were fully warranted to esteem it "an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company, or to come unto one of another nation;" as Peter expressly declares, after "God had shewed him that he should not now call any man common or unclean †."

The people of Israel were thus separated unto God as his peculiar people. He distinguished them from all other nations, gave them his statutes and ordinances, set his tabernacle in the midst of them, and dwelt among them as their God ‡. This relation, in which the fleshly seed of Abraham stood to the Most High, was only of an outward and temporal nature, and intended as a type or figure of that spiritual and eternal relation, which subsists between God and the people of the new covenant, who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, and made kings and priests unto God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ §. No earthly nation ever was, or could be the antitype of Israel according to the flesh. Our Lord said to the Jews "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof ||;" and we perceive, from the way in which Peter addresses the strangers scattered throughout a variety of countries, what class of people was pointed out by Jesus, as inheriting the blessings of this kingdom. Of these strangers, as a part of the whole redeemed company gathered out of all nations, he says, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light **;" applying to them in a much

* Lev. Chap. xi.

† Acts x. 15, 28.

‡ Psalms cxlvii. 19, 20.—Deut. iv. 1—9.—Exod. xxix. 45, 46.—Lev. xvi. 11, 12.

§ Rev. i. 5, 6, and vii. 9. || Mat. xxi. 43. ** 1 Pet. ii. 9.

higher sense, the epithets which had been given to the holy typical seed, under the Old Testament dispensation*.

If then, the nation of Israel was separated from all other nations, in the whole of their typical economy and worship; does it not necessarily follow, that true believers, under the Gospel dispensation, who are the antitype of Israel after the flesh, ought, in their spiritual worship, to have no fellowship with those who do not visibly belong to the kingdom of heaven? Though with respect to preaching the Gospel to all men for their salvation, and maintaining civil intercourse with them, God hath shewed us that we should not call any man common or unclean. How else could they appear to be a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, &c. in distinction from the world around them? Is that kind of separation which is enjoined in the New Testament, of less importance than the typical separation of the ancient people of God from the Gentile nations? Or will any dare to affirm, that the institutions of Christ under the Gospel, may be profaned with more impunity than the carnal ordinances of Moses?

2d. THE distinction which was to take place between the true children of God, and outward nominal professors, who boast of their external privileges, was pointed out by John Baptist, who came to prepare the way of the Lord, as the forerunner of the great Messiah. "When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees, come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than

* Exod. xix. 5, 6.

I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*." He sweeps away all their vain pretensions, intimating, that their descent from Abraham would be of no avail to obtain the blessings of Messiah's kingdom; that the almighty power of God is necessary to make men the true children of Abraham; and that, if they claimed the honour of being such, they must shew it by their fruits. He informs them, that one mightier than he was about to come; and that he would effectually distinguish between the wheat and the chaff, taking the most signal vengeance on many of those who said, We have Abraham to our father, but were, notwithstanding, the enemies of God, and the children of the devil.

These words of John, not only shew, that when the kingdom of the Messiah should be established, those alone, who gave evidence of their faith in Christ, by obeying him, would really be the children of Abraham; or, which is the same thing, "The children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" but also, that no other persons were then to be reckoned such, or to be accounted worthy of the privileges of Christ's kingdom. Before the coming of John Baptist, there were in the Jewish nation, some of the true children of God, "Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God†." But they were intermixed with unbelievers, and enjoyed in common with them, the external privileges of the kingdom of God, which, in a federal and typical sense, included the whole nation of Israel. John must therefore be understood, as announcing an alteration *in this respect*, and informing the Jews, that neither they, nor any others, who did not bring forth fruits meet for repentance, would be *considered* as subjects of Messiah's kingdom, or entitled to the blessings and immunities of the happy people over whom he was to reign.

* Mat. iii. 7,—13.

† John i. 13.

SECOND DISCOURSE.

2 TIM. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

AFTER enquiring in a former discourse; what sort of characters those men possess, from whom we are commanded to turn away; and what danger is to be apprehended from them. We began to illustrate and enforce the commandment itself; 1st. By the separation of the ancient typical people of God, from the nations around them; and, 2^d. By the doctrine of John the Baptist. We now observe,

3^d. THAT the doctrine delivered by Jesus Christ himself, during his personal ministry, illustrates and confirms what was spoken by his messenger who prepared his way. In his discourse with Nicodemus, he teaches the necessity of men being born again, in order to their becoming subjects of the kingdom of God. He says, "Except a man be born again, born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*." And he distinguishes this from the fleshly birth, which entitled the seed of Abraham to the privileges of God's ancient kingdom, "That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit†." He addressed the Pharisees, who were the strictest sect among the Jews, as a race of carnal men, who, with the highest pretensions to religion and zeal for the glory of God, were grossly ignorant of the true character of God, and of their duty both to him and to their fellow-men. He exposed their hypocrisy in a variety of particulars, their intolerable pride, their covetousness and extortion, their profane swearing coloured over with religious pretexts, their bigotry and persecuting spirit, and thus addressed

* 1 John iii. 9, 10.

† Verse 6.

them, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell*?" He repelled all their claims founded on their being the seed of Abraham, and having one father even God. To these he answered, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham, but now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. If God were your father, ye would love me, because I proceeded forth, and came from God. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do†." He told them, that the kingdom of God would be taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. "Many," says he, "shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. But *the children of the kingdom* shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth‡." He delivered a prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, containing a most minute and particular account of the things which were to precede this awful judgment, the signs of his coming for this purpose, and the accumulated sufferings which were then to be heaped upon the Jewish nation§; every article of which was exactly fulfilled, and the whole issued in the complete destruction, both of their civil and religious establishment.

Will it be affirmed, notwithstanding all these things, that the kingdom of Israel, which it is admitted was once the kingdom of God, ought to be considered by Christians, as an example for their imitation? Would you have any hand in establishing, or supporting such a kingdom, as that which hath already suffered the most signal vengeance of the God of heaven? A multitude of carnal men, wallowing in all the lusts of this world, yet claiming a relation to God as their father, and pretending to worship him! Are there any real believers of the Gospel, who so entirely lose sight of all the glorious things affirmed of the kingdom of

* Mat. xxiii. throughout.

† Mat. xxi, 43. Chap. viii. 11, 12.

‡ John viii. 39, 40, 44.

§ Mat. xxiv.

the Messiah, both by ancient prophets, and by Christ himself and his apostles, as to debase it in such a manner? One could scarcely believe it possible, were it not contained in the prophetic Scriptures, and exemplified before our eyes.

To return to the doctrine of Christ, who best knew how to describe his own kingdom. He testifies, in the good confession which he witnessed before Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence*." His kingdom is so diametrically opposite to every thing that is worldly, that men who judge from worldly principles, are at a loss to understand the description of it. They know not what is meant by a spiritual and heavenly kingdom. Without all peradventure, however, the kingdom which Jesus came to establish is of this nature, as appears from its being often denominated "the kingdom of heaven."

The *subjects* of it are spiritual, and born from above, as we have seen: they are not of this world, even as Christ himself was not of this world†. He describes them as being "of the truth;" and this is that truth which he had heard of God, and came in his name to declare; for when he confesses that he was a king, he adds, "to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth‡." He testified that he himself was the Christ, the Messiah, or anointed Saviour, declaring that "the Spirit of the Lord God was upon him, because he had anointed him to preach the Gospel to the poor, and sent him to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord||." He testified that he was the Son of God, "who is in the bosom of the Father**," who existed

* John xviii. 36.

† John xv. 19. and xvii. 14, 16.

‡ John xviii. 37.

|| Luke iv. 16.—23.

** Mat. xvi. 16, 17. John x. 36. and i. 18.

"before Abraham*," and "had glory with the Father before the world was†;" that the Father also "hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father‡;" that "he and his Father are one||;" and that "the Son of Man who came down from heaven," while he spoke to men upon earth, "was in heaven**." He declared also that "he came to give his life a ransom for many††," and that "every one who seeth the Son and believeth on him, shall have everlasting life, and he will raise him up at the last day‡‡." This is the truth which he came to testify, and which he confirmed by miraculous works, and particularly by rising again from the dead, by which "he was declared to be the Son of God with power|||."

The subjects of his kingdom "are of this truth" *by believing it*, in consequence of divine illumination; for "they are all taught of God, and every one that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto Christ*." In his intercessory prayer to the Father, he says concerning his disciples, "I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. I have given unto them, the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely, that I came out from thee,

* John viii. 58.

† John xvii. 5.

‡ John v. 22, 23.

|| John x. 30.

** John iii. 13.

These sayings of Christ, as well as many other express declarations in the word of God, shew in the clearest manner, not indeed that he is the Son in his divine nature abstractly considered, but that he who is the Son of God, and who came of the seed of David according to the flesh, "is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen*." He is denominated the Son of God on account of his incarnation, for the angel said to Mary, "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God†;" and it was when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth, that they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father||." He is also the Son of God, as being the first begotten of the dead, and exalted to the right hand of the Father, possessing universal dominion, as the heir of all things, and the prince of the kings of the earth‡."

* Rom. ix. 5.

† Luke i. 35.

|| Jo. i. 14.

‡ Acts xiii. 33. compare with Psal. ii. 7. to the end. Col. i. 12. Heb. i. 2. Rev. i. 5. Psal. lxxxix. 27.

†† Mat. xx. 28.

‡‡ John vi. 40.

||| Rom. i. 4.

* John vi. 45.

and they have believed that thou didst send me*.” His disciples or subjects, are lovers of this truth, as it reconciles them to God, and is the foundation of all their hope for eternity. They are obedient to that form of doctrine into which they are moulded†, conformed to Christ, and willing to suffer with him in this world, in the hope of being glorified together with him‡; for he says, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake and the Gospel’s, the same shall save it||.” In this manner he characterizes those who are of the truth, “every one that is of the truth heareth my voice**;” and he describes his sheep in the same way, “my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me††.” On the contrary, “they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers‡‡.” No man therefore can belong to the kingdom of Christ, unless he is taught of God to know the truth which saves, to enjoy its consolation, to obey it from the heart, and to follow such a line of conduct, as will make it appear, that he is not of this world.

The *immunities and privileges* of the kingdom of Christ are not worldly, for “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ|||.” He hath promised nothing more than food and raiment in relation to temporal enjoyments*; these are not the portion of his people, and they have no assurance of freedom from affliction in this world, but the contrary, for “through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God††.” The inheritance itself, which is the principal blessing that belongs to the subjects of this kingdom, is “incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not a-

* John xvii. 6, 8.
xii. 32. James i. 12. and v. 7, 8.

† Rom. vi. 17.

‡ 2 Tim ii. 12. Luke

|| Mark viii. 34, 35.

** John xviii. 37.

†† John x. 27.

‡‡ John x. 5.

||| Eph. i. 3. * Mat. vi. 30, 32, 33. Luke xii. 28.—32. 1 Tim. vi. 6, 7, 8.

†† Acts xiv. 22.

way, and is reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation *."

The *means of establishing, defending, and promoting the interests* of this kingdom, are not worldly. No service was ever done to it by the riches, power, and splendour of this world; nor did it ever gain any real ascendancy by means of human craft and policy, or by the enticing words of man's wisdom. It was at first established, merely by the preaching of the Gospel, which proclaims "peace on earth, and good will towards men." The instruments employed for this purpose were such as men esteemed foolish, weak, base, and contemptible; but while they had to combat with all the power of earth and hell, the weapons of these messengers of God, which were not carnal, were "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ †."

Our Lord shews in the clearest manner that the sword cannot be used in his kingdom, not even for the purpose of defending it, when he says, "If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." I say *cannot be used*, for those who have taken this method to advance or defend the kingdom of Christ, always meant, in some respect or other, to establish tenets in direct opposition to it. Admitting that some of the children of God themselves, have been so far deceived, as to take the sword in defence of their religion, or in order to compel men to profess the faith, it is impossible in the nature of the thing, that, in this particular, they could be actuated by a desire to propagate or defend the true religion, though they ignorantly thought so; because it does not admit of any such defence. It suffers more by the violence of its friends than by all the violence that can be directed against it by its most inveterate enemies. And we may lay it down as a sure principle, that whene-

* 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

† 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

ver men begin to fight in the cause of religion, they have something else in view than the religion of Christ.

It is absolutely necessary in the present state of human affairs, that a worldly kingdom should defend itself by violent means, both against external and internal enemies. This is admitted in what our Lord says to Pilate; and in Paul's description of the power of the civil magistrate, "He beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that doth evil*." I do not say so with a view to give any countenance to destructive wars. No sober-minded person can hesitate to pronounce all *offensive wars* unlawful. They arise from the lusts of men, from pride, ambition, avarice, and revenge; and one of the parties at least must be answerable for all the blood that is shed. It may sometimes however be difficult to determine which party is the aggressor, for it frequently happens in these matters, as in private quarrels, that both are to blame. A kingdom of this world may exist without fighting for conquest, or in order to revenge insults which might be otherwise accommodated. Nay, its real happiness and prosperity depend, in a great measure, on avoiding war; for it is the bane of human society, the chief destroyer of earthly comforts, and an extensive mean of hastening the perdition of souls. But still the sword is necessary to defend a nation of this world against its enemies; this mean of defence is essential to its safety, and even to its existence; for otherwise it would soon be dismembered, and torn in pieces.

Now in this respect our Lord distinguishes his kingdom from all earthly kingdoms. "If my kingdom were of this world," says he, "then would my servants fight, &c." It was impossible to have given a more conclusive proof of what he asserts. Notwithstanding his being surrounded by chosen friends, on whose fidelity he could have depended, had he inclined to make them warriors, and having many among the Jews who were willing to espouse his cause, and who on one occasion "would have taken him by force to make

* Rom. xiii, 4. see also 1 Pet. ii. 14.

him a king* ;” he suffered himself to be apprehended, bound, insulted, and dragged to death, without attempting the smallest resistance. When one of his servants began to use the sword in his defence, he miraculously healed the wound that was inflicted by it, and said to his mistaken friend, “ Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword†.” How then can that kingdom be of this world, the subjects of which are prohibited from fighting in defence of their King and Lord? Would to God that all the professed servants of Christ, in every age, had in this respect acted suitably to the nature of his kingdom. What an immense slaughter of the human species would have been prevented !

Jesus also not only distinguishes his kingdom from worldly kingdoms in general, but from the ancient kingdom of God in Israel, for he says, “ *now* is my kingdom not from hence :” which seems to intimate that it had been otherwise in former times, and that he was now going to establish a new kingdom, altogether different in its nature and principles, from any thing that had hitherto taken place in the world.

FROM this brief summary of the doctrine of Christ concerning the characters of those who were to be *accounted* his disciples, and the nature of his kingdom, it appears that none ought to partake of the ordinances which he hath instituted but those who are of the truth, who hear his voice, and who like him are not of this world : and consequently, that it is the duty of real believers of the Gospel, to observe Christ’s ordinances in a state of separation from all whom they can discern to be unbelievers, and worldly men.

4th. THE practice of the Apostles, and other first ministers of the Word, exactly corresponded with our Lord’s doctrine on this subject, for they administered the ordinance of baptism, and received into churches, those only, who by their confession of the faith, appeared to be the disciples of

* John vi. 15.

† Mat. xxvi. 51, 52.

Christ, and subjects of the kingdom of heaven. Even the disciples of John "were baptized of him in the river of Jordan, *confessing their sins**." When he warned them of their danger, and preached the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, they asked him, "What shall we do then?" And he gave them general instructions to regulate their conduct, similar to those afterwards given by Jesus Christ and his Apostles†. He only preached, however, that "the kingdom of heaven was at hand," calling men on this account to repentance‡. We cannot therefore expect to find, in the time of his ministry, such a marked distinction between believers and unbelievers, as that which appears in the doctrine and practice of the apostles after the resurrection of Jesus, when the kingdom of heaven, actually came in all its divine simplicity and glory, and was established among men on the earth, by the power and grace of the Most High.

The three thousand persons who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, were first converted to the Christian faith, by the sermon which Peter preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. "They were pricked in their hearts, and said, Men and brethren what shall we do?" And when Peter had called them to "repent and be baptized every one of them in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, they gladly received his word§." These were not the whole of that great multitude, who on this occasion heard him preach the Gospel; for, among other things, he says to them, "save yourselves from this untoward generation**." The persons who thus repented, received the word with gladness, and were baptized, "were on the same day added unto them," that is, to the church of Christ at Jerusalem, the hundred and twenty brethren mentioned in the foregoing chapter. "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers††." These were not mere forms; their whole hearts were engaged in the service of God, and their subsequent history gives abun-

* Mark i. 5.

§ Acts ii. 37, 38, 41.

† Luke iii. 10—15.

** Verse 40.

‡ Mat. iii. 2.

†† Verse 41, 42.

dant evidence of the reality of their faith. Those also whom the Lord afterwards added to this church daily, were "such as should be saved*." The whole body is termed "the multitude of them that believed;" and they were "of one heart, and of one soul†."

A similar account is given of those who were baptized in the city of Samaria, to whom Christ was preached by Philip the Evangelist. "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did. And there was great joy in that city‡." They had formerly been bewitched with the forceries of Simon, to such a degree, that they were induced to say, "this man is the great power of God. But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also, and was baptized||." In like manner, when the Eunuch of Ethiopia, to whom Philip preached Jesus, said, on coming to a certain water, "See here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch, and he baptized him**." This Ethiopian also enjoyed the consolation of the truth which Philip had preached to him, for "he went on his way rejoicing††."

Lydia and her household were baptized, after hearing from Paul the glad tidings of salvation. Of her it is affirmed that "the Lord opened her heart, so that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul‡‡;" and of her household, that it consisted of brethren who were comforted by Paul and Silas*.. These two messengers of peace spake the word of the Lord to the jailor at Philippi, and to all that were in his house, "He and all his were baptized straightway; and he rejoiced, believing in God with all his

* Acts ii. 47.

† Acts iv. 32.

‡ Acts viii. 6, 8.

|| Acts viii. 10, 12, 13.

** Verse 36, 37, 38.

†† Verse 39.

‡‡ Acts xvi. 14.

*.. Verse 40.

house*.” When Paul preached the Gospel at Corinth, “Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord, with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized†”: among whom were Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas‡; and of this household it is affirmed, that “they were the first fruits of Achia, and had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints§.”

So far as I recollect, these are all the instances of the baptism of particular persons that are recorded in the New Testament, except the baptism of our Lord himself, and that of the apostle Paul; and the whole of them clearly evince, that believers of the Gospel are the only fit subjects of baptism. In this way, the apostles pointedly fulfilled the commission which they had received from Jesus Christ, “Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**.” “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned††.” And they also taught those whom they had baptized, “to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded them‡‡.”

You have seen already what sort of persons the church at Jerusalem consisted of, which was intended as a model to all succeeding churches; and you may now attend to the description that is given of some of the other churches, which were planted by the Apostles. The sacred historian gives a particular account of the gathering of the Church at Ephesus by the preaching of Paul, in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts. When Paul arrived at that place, he found about twelve disciples, who knew only the baptism of John. These persons, having heard John, or some of his disciples, “saying unto them, that they should believe on him who should come after John, that is on Christ Je-

* Acts xvi. 30,—35.

† Acts xviii. 8.

‡ 1 Cor i. 14, 16.

§ 1 Cor. xvi. 15.

** Mat. xxviii. 19.

†† Mark xvi. 15, 16.

‡‡ Mat. xxviii. 20.

fus," had already been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. After Paul had preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus, and "when divers were hardened believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude; he departed from them, and separated the disciples†" from the unbelieving Jews, forming them into a distinct society as a church of Christ; turning at the same time also to the Gentiles, to whom he preached the Gospel when it was rejected by the Jews. A very remarkable account is given of the effects produced by the word of God. "Many that believed, came and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many also of them who used curious arts, brought their books together and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed‡." This is the beginning of the church of God at Ephesus, to the elders of which, the same Apostle afterwards says, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood§." You see therefore, that a society which the Lord acknowledges as a church of Christ, consists of persons whom God hath purchased with his own blood. In the epistle written by Paul to this church, he denominates them, in distinction surely from the people in general who dwelt there, "the saints who are at Ephesus**;" affirms, that they "trusted in Christ after they heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation; in whom also," says he, "after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise††;" and represents them as having been "dead in sins, but now quickened together with Christ, partakers of the riches of divine mercy, saved by grace, and created in Christ Jesus unto good works‡‡." They were formerly "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; but

* Acts xix. 3, 4, 5.

§ Acts xx. 28.

† Verse 8, 9.

** Eph. i. 1.

‡ Verse 18, 19, 20.

†† Verse 13.

‡‡ Eph. ii. 1, 5, 7, 8, 10.

now they were made nigh by the blood of Christ, reconciled to God by his cross, fellow-citizens with the saints, and builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*."

A SIMILAR description is given of all the churches in the New Testament, on which I need not enlarge. The Romans are characterised as "beloved of God, called to be saints†;" the Corinthians, as "sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called by God the Father, to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord‡;" the Colossians, as "saints and faithful brethren in Christ||;" and the Christians at Thessalonica, as "the church of the Thessalonians which was in God the Father, and in our Lord Jesus Christ**." This was not a vague judgment of charity, pronounced without any proper evidence; the Apostle "knew their election of God," by the effects which the Gospel produced upon them; for he says, "our Gospel came not to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit," &c.†† And he expresses his confidence with respect to the whole Church at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, "that he who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;" for he adds, "even as it is meet for me to think this of *you all*, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel, *ye all* are partakers of my grace. For God is my record how greatly I long after *you all* in the bowels of Jesus Christ‡‡."

There were indeed many things opposite to the genuine influence of the Gospel, in *some* of those churches, to which epistles were sent by the Apostles of Christ, and in five of

* Eph. ii. 12, 13, 16, 19, 22.

† Rom. i. 7.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 2.

|| Col. i. 2.

** 1 Theff. i. 1.

†† Verse 4, 5, 6.

‡‡ Phil. i. 1, 6, 7, 8.

the seven churches in Asia, which our Lord himself immediately addressed; such as, envying, strife and divisions, disrespect to the poor, over-reaching one another in their dealings, eating things sacrificed to idols, and even immoralities of the grossest kind, as well as dangerous errors respecting the faith*. In short, there is scarcely any evil that prevails in the world, of which you will not find instances in one or other of the churches. This is admitting all that can be charged against them by the greatest enemies of that purity of communion, which, after all, I am confident, was strictly enjoined on the first churches, and, upon the whole, exemplified in their conduct.

The wickedness that was committed by individual members among them, and the lukewarmness, and other symptoms of apostacy, that too generally prevailed in some of these churches, are surely not recorded for our imitation. Did the Apostles of Christ approve of these things? Did they tolerate them, or give the churches permission to do so? Were they not, on the contrary, often employed in re-proving and admonishing those who had sinned, calling them to repentance, and assuring them that they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Did not Paul solemnly command the Corinthians, to put away from among themselves a wicked person†; and express his fear that his God would humble him among them, and that he should bewail many who had sinned, and had not repented‡? which implies that they also would be excommunicated, if they did not repent. He likewise says to the Galatians, with respect to the corrupters of the Gospel doctrine among them, "I would they were even cut off who trouble you||," and this is the rule which ought to regulate the procedure of churches, in dealing with all such persons, "a man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, *reject*; knowing, that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself**." Not only

* Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians. Also, Rev. chaps. ii. & iii.

† 1 Cor. chap. v.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 21.

|| Gal. v. 12.

** Titus iii. 10, 11.

the persons who committed sin, but the churches which did not purge out this old leaven, were highly blamed for their remissness in discipline, as appears from Paul's complaints against the church at Corinth, on account of their retaining a wicked person in their communion; from the deep distress in which his first letter involved the church; and from the zeal, repentance, and indignation which it occasioned*. The same thing also will be discerned by every attentive reader, in our Lord's method of addressing the churches in Asia. He commends one of them, because she "could not bear them that were evil; and had tried them who said they were apostles, and were not, and had found them liars†." And he condemns several others, for having among them those who committed iniquity.

Churches, such as those which were planted by the Apostles, are reclaimable when they go astray. The Word of God has access to their hearts, and when it is brought home to their consciences, they will fall before its power, and glorify God, by confessing and forsaking their iniquity, as we see the church at Corinth did, on that occasion which has been already mentioned. This is one of the most genuine marks of true Christianity, for in this imperfect state, Christians themselves are subject to many departures from the living God; they have often occasion to repent; and when "they confess their sins, God is faithful and just to forgive them their sins, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness‡." The disciples of Christ, ought not therefore to be too precipitate in leaving the fellowship of a church, if it can in any respect be justly considered as a church of Christ, though there be many evils in it. It is their duty to use every mean that is appointed in the Word of God for remedying these evils, and to imitate the long-suffering of God, in their conduct towards their brethren. Thus far, we may safely improve what is said in the New Testament, concerning the corruptions of the first churches.

* 1 Cor. vii. 8,—13.

† Rev. ii. 2.

‡ 1 John i. 9.

But what has all this to do with religious societies, which consist principally of worldly men professing Christianity, who never felt the power of the Gospel, who are taught solely by education and custom to attend to *any* religious forms, who have scarcely a shadow of discipline among them of any kind, and none of that which the Word of God inculcates, and who would smile at the feeble attempts of those who might wish to obtain purity of communion? Is there any possibility of reforming such churches? Might you not with as great propriety talk of reforming the world? It does not appear from any thing, either in the history of the first churches contained in the New Testament, or in the promises respecting future times, that God himself intends to reform them, in any other way than by demolishing them altogether. It is opposite to every idea of a church of Christ that can be gathered from the New Testament, to suppose that a society in which there is no discrimination between the people of God and the world, can deserve to be so named. On the contrary, it is easy to discern in this particular, the influence of "that *Antichrist* which you have heard should come," and now of a long time has been in the world; that monstrous power which, under a profession of subjection to Christ, has trampled on many of his laws, opened the flood-gates of corruption, and spoiled the simplicity and glory of the primitive churches. Even those churches, which in the days of the Apostles were the temples of the living God, became at last so corrupt, that he who "walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and holds the stars in his right hand *," entirely disowned and forsook them. This he threatened when he said, "I will spue thee out of my mouth. I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent†." It was the duty of all the true fearers of God to separate from these churches, whenever they became totally incorrigible, and in their united capacity refused subjection to the laws of the King of Zion; for at this awful period, God himself

* Rev. i. 13, 16. and ii. 1.

† Rev. iii. 16. and ii. 5.

withdrew from their assemblies. And it was always unquestionably the duty of such, to turn away from those corrupt societies of nominal Christians, which have been gathered by the influence of the *Man of Sin*, and never ought to have been considered as the dwelling places of the Most High.

sth. It is evident from the nature and design of Gospel ordinances, that believers of the truth alone ought to partake of them; and not only those who may be considered as unworthy communicants, but all who join with them, are guilty of a high profanation of these ordinances. Baptism signifies the remission of sins through the blood of Christ*. It represents the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God, and is an outward sign or token to them who believe, of their fellowship with Christ in his death, who bare their sins in his own body on the tree; and in his resurrection, who is become the first fruits of them that sleep, and will raise up all his people to the enjoyment of eternal life†." It signifies also our being dead unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord; and points out to us the necessity of walking in newness of life, as those who have obtained mercy‡." But to any person, whether an infant or an adult, who has no enjoyment of remission, no fellowship with Christ in his death, no hope of life eternal through his resurrection from the dead, and who has no experience of a new and spiritual life in Christ Jesus; of what avail is baptism? It is in one view a mere unmeaning ceremony. All that can be seen in it is "the putting away of the filth of the flesh," when the person baptised has not "the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ**." And in another view, it is debasing and prostituting of a solemn ordinance of the Gospel.

The same thing may be observed with respect to the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine signify the body of

* Mark iv. 1. Acts ii. 38. and xxii. 16.

† Rom. vi. 3, 4, 5. Col. ii. 12.

‡ Rom. vi. 4. to the end. Col. ii. 11, 13. Tit. iii. 5.

** 1 Pet. iii. 21.

Christ broken for his own people, and his blood shed for the remission of their sins. In this ordinance, they remember with grateful hearts, the death of the Lord Jesus, and shew it forth as the foundation of all their hope until he come again*. But what is the Lord's Supper to thousands and millions of professing Christians, who never think of Christ at all, who have no conviction of their need of salvation by him, no enjoyment of peace with God through his atonement, nor any joyful hope in the prospect of his second coming? It is not, when such partake of it, an innocent unmeaning form. "They eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body. They are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord†." If there is any such thing enjoined in the New Testament as purity of communion, if brethren in a church are commanded to watch over one another, to bring offenders to repentance, or to purge them out as old leaven, that they may be a new lump, since even Christ their passover is sacrificed for them; surely none of those can be guiltless, who in any respect join in this profanation of the ordinances of the Lord. More indeed might be said in the present case, for these admonitions are given to *a church of Christ*, which had fallen into a disorderly way of eating the Lord's Supper, on which account many of them were "chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world‡." But how much greater is the evil when *the world themselves* are employed in the outward observance of this ordinance, while they are entirely ignorant of its nature, and have no enjoyment of what is signified in it?

We must not be told, as an excuse for joining in Christ's ordinances with men who have no just pretensions to the fear of God, that many of the Jews under the former dispensation were unbelievers with respect to the spiritual promise made to their fathers, and that all of them were in a great measure ignorant of what was signified by the ordinances, that were then of divine institution, while ne-

* Luke xxii. 19, 20. 1 Cor. xi. 23.—27.

† 1 Cor. xi. 27, 29.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21, 22, 30, 31, 32.

vertheless they were bound to observe them. It was not the design of God that they should "steadfastly look to the end of that which was to be abolished.*" This unfolding of mysteries was reserved for the coming of the Messiah, and there is a contrast in this respect between the Old and the New Testament dispensation. Carnal worshippers will not now be accepted, for "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth†." We must not go back to that covenant which has "decayed, waxed old, and vanished away‡;" nor "turn again to its weak and beggarly elements," which would bring us into bondage||.

6th. THERE are several express commandments, besides the injunction in the text, obliging the people of God to have no religious fellowship with unbelievers, whether they are Jews, idolatrous Gentiles, or antichristian professors.

Believing Jews were permitted for a time to worship in the synagogues, and in the temple, and to observe the law of Moses; which, being a divine institution, they could not be sinners in obeying it, till it was set aside by express divine revelation. This accounts for the mixture of believing and unbelieving Jews in their peculiar worship, while only the former had communion with the churches of Christ. The complete abrogation of the old covenant, and all that pertained to it, does not seem to have been clearly revealed, till the epistle to the Hebrews was written; and it was not actually accomplished till Jerusalem was destroyed. But when this revelation was given, Jewish Christians were called off entirely from their connection with carnal worshippers. They were to "go without the camp" of Israel, as Jesus "suffered without the gate" of Jerusalem, "bearing his reproach, and remembering that they had here no continuing city, and fought one to come**." This obliged them to drop all their

* 2 Cor. iii. 13.

|| Gal. iv. 9.

† John iv. 23, 24.

‡ Heb. viii. 13.

** Heb. xiii. 12, 13, 14.

former prejudices, and to forsake entirely the carnal ordinances of Moses.

Both Jewish and Gentile Christians were strictly prohibited from having any connection with the idolatrous worship of the heathen, and from joining in Christian fellowship with unbelievers. On this subject the Apostle thus addresses the church at Corinth, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them; and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*." The arguments here used by the Apostle, conclude equally against their worshipping in heathen temples, and admitting unbelievers to have fellowship with them, whom he denominates the temple of the living God. He shews in a most irresistible manner, the glaring inconsistency of such conduct. To maintain that there is any propriety in believers having fellowship with unbelievers, is equally absurd, as it would be to affirm that righteousness may have fellowship with unrighteousness, that light may have communion with darkness, and that no irreconcilable discord subsists between Christ and Belial, or between the temple of God and idols. The highest encouragement also is given to come out from among them, and be separate, and to avoid even touching the unclean thing; for in connection with this, the Lord promises to dwell among his people, and to manifest himself to them as their God and father. But you will say, these were Pagan idolaters. I am not however disposed to consider them as more criminal

* 2 Cor. vi. 14. to the end.

in the sight of God, than men who take up an empty profession of the name of Christ, and commit the same wickedness as they do. You will see a remarkable familiarity between many of the characters ascribed to the heathen in Rom. i. 29, 30, 31. and those mentioned in the text, as belonging to persons who have a form of godliness. The guilt of the latter is aggravated beyond that of the former, by their abuse of the superior privileges which they enjoy; and the danger arising from them to the disciples of Christ, is unquestionably greater.

There are, however, other commandments of the Lord, which apply directly to the connection of believers of the truth with false professors. The Apostle had *them only* in view, when he said, "from such turn away;" and a more plain or express injunction than this, with respect to any duty, cannot be found in all the word of God. In relation to some of those false teachers and deceivers, who had then begun at Rome to subvert the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, having their own temporal interest in view, while they professed to serve Christ; the Apostle says to the believing Romans, "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and *avoid them*; for they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*." There were in other places also besides Rome, men who taught things opposite to the genuine influence of the truth, who "consented not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, and were proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness:" *from such* Timothy is expressly commanded to *withdraw himself*†.

I will not mention as an authority for turning away from

* Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

† 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.

unbelievers, the commandment to the Theſſalonians, to “note that man who walked diſorderly, not working, but going about as a buſy body, and to have no company with him, that he might be aſhamed;” for this relates to the caſe of a Chriſtian brother, who, from an indolent diſpoſition, or from miſtaken views of religion, may idle away too much of his time. We muſt not give any countenance to this practice, which is hurtful both to ſoul and body; and the beſt way to make a man aſhamed of ſuch conduct, is to keep no company with him, that is, to allow him to ſpend none of that time with us which we know might be better employed; or, in other words, to admoniſh him, and ſend him to his work: for the Apoſtle adds, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admoniſh him as a brother*.”

But there is another commandment which is exactly in point. I ſhall give it you in the words of the Apoſtle John. “And I heard another voice from heaven, ſaying, Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her ſins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her ſins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities†.” That ſociety from which the people of God are thus mercifully called by a voice from heaven, is Babylon, or the falſe church, whoſe iniquities are ſo multiplied and various, that time would fail me to recount them. She pretends to be the ſpouſe of Chriſt, but is in reality a prostitute, “committing fornication with the kings of the earth, and making the inhabitants of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication‡.” She has corrupted the Goſpel, and profaned its ordinances. She has long kept the people of God in bondage, enſlaving their ſouls by the influence of human authority. She is full of abomination and filthineſs; every thing that is hateful to God is found in her; and awful indeed will be that deſtruction which ſhall come upon her, for it is “the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance of his temple§.” There are many diſputes about what claſs of people is meant by this Babylon, though

* 2 Theſſ. iii. 6,—16.

† Rev. xviii. 4, 5.

‡ Rev. xvii. 1, 2.

§ Jer. li. 11.

all parties might easily discern, that a wicked society, falsely claiming the character of the Church of Christ, is intended. Protestants generally apply the description that is given of her, solely to the church of Rome; while Catholics most absurdly endeavour to show, that the wicked Power described in Rev. xvii. is Rome heathen. I will not at present enter into a full discussion of this subject. But, keeping to the point in hand, I affirm on the authority of the Word of God, that wherever you see men professing godliness, and attending outwardly to the ordinances of the Gospel, while their conduct proves them to be destitute of true religion; there you see the false church: which, if it is not Babylon the great, the *mother* of harlots, is without all peradventure one of her *daughters*. And it does not alter the case, if we should find among them some of the real children of God; for they would not be called to come out of Babylon, if they were not there. It is of great importance to discern, in a just point of view, the dreadful iniquity of a corrupt profession of Christianity; and this is undoubtedly one leading part of it. What else could have raised the Man of Sin to his impious throne, and armed him with that tyrannical power, which he has long exercised over the souls and bodies of men? By what other method shall we account for *whole nations* assuming a form of godliness without the power of it, if we do not admit, that the influence of the Man of Sin gradually extended this unscriptural, and spurious profession of Christianity, till at last it spread universally over the whole of Europe? And since it cannot be denied that the same evil continues in many Protestant churches, which are reformed from the gross idolatry, and superstition of the church of Rome, is there any want of candour, or of charity, in judging them on this account to be *antichristian*? There is not a more certain and decisive mark of Antichrist in all the Word of God, than an outward form of Christianity, in connection with every thing that is opposite to its genuine spirit. This is an essential part of his character, and is easily discernible, in almost all that is said of him in the

prophetic Scriptures. This call from heaven, therefore, makes it the bounden duty of the people of God, to come out of every religious society, in which ungodly men partake of the solemn ordinances of the Gospel. They are called to this, in the foresight of that destruction which is coming upon Babylon. They cannot avoid a participation of her guilt, while they do not "flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul*;" for the voice says, "Come out of her my people, *that ye be not partakers of her sins:*" and they are in the utmost danger of "receiving of her plagues."

* Jer. li. 6.

THIRD DISCOURSE.

2 TIM. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

IN the last discourse, I endeavoured to illustrate and enforce, the duty of separation from the world in religious fellowship. You may now attend to another observation, which is intimately connected with this subject.

THE disciples of Christ are not only bound to turn away from antichristian societies, but to be closely united to one another in the bonds of Christian love ; and, in their joint capacity as churches, to observe all the institutions of the kingdom of heaven. The persons who were converted by the preaching of the Apostles, were immediately baptized, and added to churches, if this last was possible from their local situation. In places where they had only just begun to preach the Gospel, those who believed it met together, and observed all the ordinances, to which in this situation they could attend ; and, whenever men appeared among them, properly qualified for the work of the ministry, they were organized, or set in order, as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ* ; and “ continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers ” All this you will see from the instance already mentioned of the church at Jerusalem, and from the whole inspired history of the first churches, in the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles†.

The ordinances which are observed in a church or congregation of Jesus Christ, are necessary for the edification of the disciples, to put them in remembrance of the truth

* Acts xiv. 23. Tit. i. 5.

† Acts ii. 42. Col. ii. 5. 1 Cor. xi. 2.

by which they are saved, to increase their faith, to strengthen their hope, to excite their love and obedience. In these they enjoy communion with God, a sense of his love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, and an anticipation of that unspeakable joy, which they shall at last obtain in his immediate presence. For Christ says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him*;" and God hath promised to "dwell among them, and walk among them; I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty†." The disciples of Christ who mutually enjoy these high privileges, will not assume any distant airs, or gratify themselves with the pride of worldly distinctions. They are connected together as brethren, in the family of their God and Father, and "are all one in Christ Jesus. There is one body, and one spirit, even as they are called in one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all‡." On these accounts, they are "besought to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace§." They treat one another as near and intimate friends, who are deeply concerned in each others welfare. They "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep**"; accounting it "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world††." They strengthen, edify, and comfort one another in every situation, with the words of eternal life‡‡; and they shew their concern for those in poor and afflicted

* John xiv. 21.

† 2 Cor. vi. 16, 18.

‡ Gal. iii. 28. Eph. iv. 4, 5, 6.

§ Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3.

** Rom. xii. 15.

†† James i. 27.

‡‡ Rom. xv. 14. Eph. iv. 15. Col. iii. 16. 1 Thess. iv. 18, & v. 11.

circumstances, not by mere words of sympathy, but by contributing to their relief as God hath prospered them*, By thus abounding in the work of faith, and labour of love to the name of Jesus, they “provoke one another to love, and to good works;” while they are also established in the faith, and excited to every Christian duty, by “not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as they see the day approaching†.” They warn and admonish those who are apparently in danger of going astray‡, and if any of them should be guilty of an evident breach of the law of Christ, they use, in the spirit of love and meekness, all those means which he hath appointed for bringing offenders to repentance||. In some cases, this may issue in the exclusion of an impenitent sinner from the fellowship of a church: but even this is done from love to his soul; it is intended “for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus**.”

If such are the advantages that may be enjoyed in this connection; and if several of the commandments that have been mentioned cannot be obeyed, except in churches, which is so evident, that it requires no argument to prove it; are not those who have forsaken Babylon, without finding their way to the dwelling places of Mount Zion, very much wanting to themselves? And must they not be conscious of living in the neglect of a great part of that duty, which they owe to their Lord and Saviour?

III. I now proceed to make a few remarks on the extent of the duty enjoined in the text; and, on the consequences resulting from the faithful performance of it.

1st. The law of Christ does not make such a complete separation between his disciples and the world, as to pre-

* 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. Heb. xiii. 16. James ii. 15, 16. 1 John iii. 17.

† Heb. x. 24, 25.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 14. Heb. iii. 13. Jude ver. 22, 23.

|| Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

** 1 Cor. v. 5.

vent hypocrites and self-deceivers from getting into the purest churches. There was a traitor among the twelve Apostles of Christ, who sold himself to commit the greatest of all crimes. As I have hinted at the case of Judas, allow me to remark, that his being present or not at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, does not affect the question we are now upon. I incline to think, from its being said by the Evangelist John, that after "having received the sop he went immediately out*," that he was not present when our Lord gave the bread and the cup to his disciples; for it is perfectly clear, that the sop was given at the Passover Supper, which preceded the institution of the Lord's Supper. None of the other Evangelists indeed take notice of this circumstance, and one of them narrates the whole transaction in such a way, as would naturally lead us to conclude that Judas was there. But they do not affirm this; and we frequently meet with a narration of historical facts in the Scripture, not in the exact order in which they happened. This appears evidently to have been done by Luke in the present case; for he mentions first the Lord's Supper, and then the giving of the sop to Judas, whereas Matthew and Mark both begin with the latter†." These three Evangelists do not narrate any circumstance inconsistent with Judas going away, immediately on his being pointed out as the traitor, and before the institution of the Lord's Supper, though they omit this particular; and as John expressly affirms it, why may we not conclude, that the first society who partook of this ordinance, with the Lord himself in the midst of them, consisted only of his chosen friends, and faithful followers; and that he purposely detected Judas, and put him away, that none else might be present on that solemn occasion? But if any think otherwise, let them remember that Judas was till then an unsuspected disciple of the Lord Jesus, for when he said, "One of you shall betray me," the suspicion did not fall upon Judas; each one of them said, "Lord is

* John xiii. 30. †

† Luke xxii 19.—23. Matth. xxvi. 21.—30. Mark xiv. 18.—26.

it I*?" A kind of intimation was given them respecting Judas, but they did not understand it then; for when Jesus said to him, "that thou dost, do quickly; no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this to him†." Supposing therefore that Judas had communion with them in this ordinance, it was not as a known hypocrite, but as a disciple of Jesus, whom they loved for the truth's sake.

Many other instances of the same kind might be mentioned. Two persons in the church at Jerusalem, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, at a time when the disciples there, were peculiarly filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit, were guilty of a singular instance of dissimulation, which brought upon them the instant vengeance of Almighty God‡. Simon Magus, soon after his being baptized on the profession of his faith, manifested himself to be "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity||." And many persons in the first churches, some by their wicked conduct, and others by their apostacy from the faith, gave complete evidence that they had never known the grace of God in truth. But every one of them had originally professed to repent and believe the Gospel, and for a time walked under its influence. This is all that we can require, if we act in conformity to the commandments of Jesus Christ, and the example of his Apostles. God alone can judge the heart, and we have nothing to regulate our judgment, but the confession of the mouth, and a line of conduct suitable to the holy profession of the name of Christ. Tares which resemble the wheat, must not be prematurely gathered up, "lest we root up also the wheat with them**." The distinction therefore which takes place in the *visible* kingdom of God in this world, is not between *real* believers, and those who only *appear* to be such; but between *the latter*, and those who, either by an unsound profession of the faith, or by their want of subjection to the laws of Christ, *do not appear* to be real believers of the Gospel. If we only understand what are the proper evi-

* Math. xxvi. 22.

† John xiii. 27, 28.

‡ Acts v. 1.—11.

|| Acts viii. 18.—24.

** Math. xiii. 29.

ñences of faith in Christ ; if we admit that no man ought to be reckoned a Christian, till he make a scriptural profession of the faith, and be “ taught by the grace of God, which hath appeared to all men bringing salvation, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this prsenet world*,” we will not be apt to err in this particular. The whole discipline of the churches, ought to be regulated by the principle that has just been mentioned. They cannot by any possible means keep themselves free of hypocrites, but they may avoid connection with all those whom Christians, judging according to the Word of God, can discern to be such.

2d. THE law of Christ, however, makes a complete separation in this respect, between legitimate professors of the faith, and those who have nothing but the name and form. Every one who has duly considered the doctrine of the New Testament on this subject, must be convinced, that Christians ought not to have fellowship *in the Lord's Supper* with visible unbelievers, or such as are easily perceived by those who follow the scriptural rule of judging, to be destitute of true Christianity ; though many, alas ! who have this conviction, find a variety of excuses for acting in opposition to it.

But Christian communion does not consist merely in a joint participation of the Lord's Supper. Believers of the Gospel have also fellowship with one another in the ordinances of prayer and praise, which always accompany the preaching of the Word. Is it not therefore highly necessary, that such as enjoy the unspeakable privilege of drawing near to God in prayer and thanksgiving, through the atonement of Christ, should consider what sort of societies they are, with which they join in these ordinances of divine worship ? If there is no distinction among them, between those who are, and those who are not accepted of God in prayer ; do not the disciples of Christ who worship in such assemblies, join with unbelievers in that service

* Tit. ii. 11, 12.

of the living God, which is peculiar to his own people? Not that I would plead for excluding men of any description whatever, from the worshipping assemblies of the people of God. All are welcome to hear the glad tidings of salvation in the churches of Christ, and to witness the observation of every institution of the kingdom of heaven. But it ought to appear, that there is a distinction made between the church and the world, that some select number of the persons present are accounted members of it, and that none have communion with it, but those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus*.” I am fully persuaded, that the disciples of Christ ought not to give countenance to religious societies of any other description, nor to join in any part of their worship. All the Scriptures that have been brought to prove the obligation that lies upon them, to have no fellowship with unbelievers, evidently carry to this extent their separation from worldly men, and false professors of the faith†.”

3d. It is by no means the intention of any one thing that is affirmed, enjoined, or exemplified in the New Testament, concerning purity of communion, to separate the people of God from one another. The persons from whom the text obliges us to “turn away,” are those alone who “have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof,” those who dishonour the Christian profession by a train of conduct altogether opposite to its purity, or who are mere nominal professors of the Christian faith. The commandments which regulate the conduct of believers of the truth, in relation to one another, run uniformly in this strain, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us‡.” “Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment||.” “If there be

* Rev. xiv. 12.

† 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17.

‡ Eph. v. 1, 2.

|| 1 Cor. i. 10.

therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, &c.*" This unity was predicted by the Prophet Jeremiah, "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever†." Ezekiel connects the same promise with the regenerating influences of the Spirit of God, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them‡." And Isaiah, when announcing, in animated and joyful strains, the future publication of the Gospel of peace, and referring to that period, says, "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion||." Jesus prayed, not only that a real invisible unity might subsist among all his disciples, but that it might appear to the world for their conviction. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me, through their word: that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me**." This unity was exemplified in the church at Jerusalem, for the whole multitude of the disciples there, "were of one heart and of one soul††." It prevailed also in several of the other primitive churches: and when any thing opposite to this appeared among them; when they were either divided in affection, or in their sentiments respecting the truth itself, and the conduct to which it leads, they were severely censured by the Apostles of Christ‡‡. Far be it from me, therefore, to say any thing that would have the smallest tendency to disturb that unity of heart and af-

* Phil. ii. 1.—6.

† Jer. xxxii. 39.

‡ Ezek. xi. 19, 20.

|| Isaiah lii. 7, 8.

** John xvii. 20.—24.

†† Acts iv. 32.

‡‡ 1 Cor. i. 11, 12, 13. and iii. 1.—10. and iv. 6, 7, 8. and xi. 16.—23.

2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. Gal. v. 15. James iii. 1, 13. to the end.

fection, or of faith and practice, which ought to subsist among "all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."

I know, however, that it will be said, with what justice will appear from a candid state of the argument on both sides, that the direct tendency of all that I have insisted for, is 'to make schisms and divisions, to alienate the affections of the people of God from one another, and to crumble them into a variety of sects and parties.' I shall probably be stigmatized as 'a leader of one of those parties, an enemy to catholic charity, and totally destitute of those liberal and enlarged sentiments, which distinguish the true spirit of Christianity from party prejudices, enthusiastic zeal, and ignorant bigotry.' These accusations are founded on the supposed impropriety of calling the people of God to forsake religious societies, in which it is confessed there are many unbelievers, because in so doing, they would separate from one another; and on the examples that are every where to be seen of numberless sectaries, formed by those who have dissented from the religion of their country.

It must be confessed, that in obeying the call of God to turn away from those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, we separate not only from persons of this description, but from all the people of God who remain in connection with them: unless we should homologate the irrational conceit of some, who gravely affirm, while they are in full communion with persons of all descriptions, that they have no *Christian fellowship* except with true believers of the Gospel. For if they have a real, though invisible fellowship, with all the children of God in heaven and on earth, so have we. "We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*." "We are come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are

* Eph. ii. 19.

written in heaven*." But, I speak of *outward visible fellowship*, and this communion we certainly have, with all our fellow-worshippers in the congregation to which we belong, while we have it not with those from whom we have separated.

After this avowal, some will perhaps expect a fair acknowledgment, that we who have turned away from anti-christian societies, have no desire to be connected with such of the disciples of Christ as we have left behind us; and that we entertain as great an aversion to them, as to the heterogenous bodies of professing Christians, of which they are members. This is by no means the case. We have nothing in view, but to obey the commandments of Jesus Christ. We have made no schism *in the church of God*, by leaving those societies which are as full of envy, strife, and division, as any other political bodies of worldly men; and which, for these and other reasons formerly mentioned, we do not consider as Christian churches. If the Word of God commands us to turn aside from false professors of Christianity, ought we to disobey this precept, because some of the genuine disciples of Christ are among them? Will their disobedience, proceeding in many cases from ignorance of their duty, excuse ours, which would be an open violation of what we certainly know to be the law of Christ†? Or, is it proper that our attachment to such persons, however well founded, should lead us to disregard the authority of God, and to act in opposition to his revealed will‡?

It is true, the things in which we differ from *real Christians* of other denominations, are not in every view essential to salvation, otherwise we could not admit the possibility of their being real Christians; but it is essential to the character of those who fear God, *that they should conscientiously obey whatever they know to be his will*. I cannot reconcile this principle with such a coalition of all parties, as has been of late earnestly recommended, and in some degree exemplified, otherwise than by supposing that these parties

* Heb. xii. 22, 23.

† Luke xii. 47, 48.

‡ Psal. xlv. 10, 11. Mat. x. 37, 38, 39. Gal. ii. 11.

have no real conscientious objection against one another's principles or practices; and particularly, that they are all agreed about the lawfulness of believers having fellowship with unbelievers*. If they are not thus agreed, how can they follow a practice opposite to their own conviction of what is made their indispensable duty by the Word of God? Is it because they reckon this a matter of small importance? I should rather think, it ought to be considered as one of the great and weightier matters of Christ's law. But in whatever light this, or any other of the divine commandments may be viewed, with respect to their comparative importance, and whatever allowance it may be necessary to make for those who ignorantly disobey them; we dare not suppose that any who know them, can neglect *the least of them* with impunity. All the peculiar laws of Christ's kingdom, are reckoned of little or no consequence, by multitudes of professing Christians; and those who plead

* No reflection is intended against that which has lately occasioned a junction of different parties. The design of propagating the Gospel among the Heathen nations, whether in a state of rudeness and barbarity, or of civilization and refinement, will certainly be approved by every one, who knows the infinite importance of salvation from the wrath to come. The unanimity, zeal, and generous exertions, which have appeared in this benevolent work, are highly commendable. Nor do I censure those, who seem willing to put an end to the unmeaning distinctions, which formerly kept them at a distance from other parties. Love is amiable in all its forms; and when it proceeds in any respect on Christian principles, it must be gratifying to all the lovers of Christ. My only design is, to shew the evil of real Christians joining with *any religious party*, which does not attend to divine ordinances in a state of separation from the world. If *their own party* is of this kind, they are as much to blame for remaining in connection with it, as they can be for having fellowship with any other. It is my own opinion, that this is the precise footing on which the matter stands, and that, whatever diversity of sentiment there may be among the *individuals* of whom the uniting parties are composed, there is in fact no material difference among them, considered as *bodies*, or distinct classes of professing Christians. Some of themselves however, think otherwise; and, if it is their opinion, that their own communion is pure, and that it ought to be so, it remains with them to free themselves from the inconsistency of giving countenance to other parties, which have no such pretensions. With persons of the former class, I argue on their own principles. Those of the latter, though in some respects more to blame, are yet more consistent with themselves.

on this account against subjection to any one of them, evidently resist his authority*. What would you think of a man, who on being hard pressed about some duties plainly enjoined on the followers of Christ, should argue in this manner against them? 'These things, I must own, are commandments of Jesus Christ, but they are not the essentials of true religion; many have obtained salvation without knowing or obeying them; and they appear to me so trifling and unimportant, that I am resolved to live in the total neglect of them.' Yet arguments of this kind, if it is proper to call them arguments, by which the wisdom of Christ is impeached, and his authority set at nought, are too frequently used by very serious professors, though they may not always speak so plainly. And it is chiefly because we refuse to tamper in this manner with the authority of the King of Zion, that we are reckoned obstinate, illiberal, and schismatical.

Further, it is the duty of all who believe the Gospel, to hearken to that commandment of God, which calls them out of antichristian societies. And if it were universally regarded by all those persons to whom it is addressed, separation from the world in religious fellowship would not appear, as in fact it is not in its own nature, a measure which has any tendency to separate the people of God from one another. On the contrary, they never can be properly united, nor "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, and in nothing terrified by their adversaries†," till they are "separated from all strangers‡, and builded together" in churches "as habitations of God, through the Spirit||." There is not any thing that I know, which so entirely defaces the visible unity of Christ's disciples, as the indiscriminate mixture of believers with unbelievers, in the observation of Gospel ordinances: nor was it possible for Antichrist himself, to have devised a more effectual mean of preventing their real uni-

* Mat. v. 19. James ii. 10.

† Phil. i. 27, 28.

‡ Neh. ix. 2.

|| Eph. ii. 22.

ty in heart and affection, their edification in the faith, and their conformity to the Son of God.

Could our accusers justly blame us, though we should now turn the challenge against them, and say, 'It is *you* that divide the people of God, by joining in religious fellowship with worldly men, and refusing to become visibly one with the despised followers of Jesus; who, amidst a great deal of sin and imperfection, wish to pay a sacred regard to all his precepts. While you remain in your present situation, you unconsciously second the efforts of the Man of Sin, to obliterate that grand distinction between the people of God and the world, which shines as a sun-beam throughout the whole of the New Testament; and to darken the minds of men, with respect to the nature of true Christianity. Before you and we can be members of the same visible church, either you must yield obedience to the Word of God, or we must act in direct opposition to it, with regard to all that it prescribes concerning the rule of Christian communion. This alternative imposes no hardship on you, for it requires nothing of you, that is not demanded by the law of Christ, whom you profess to serve. But what an intolerable burden does it lay upon us! Is it your own opinion, that we would act conscientiously in submitting to it? Surely not. Judge then, on which side the guilt of this separation lies.'

It is undeniably true, also, that among those who have separated from national churches, there is a vast variety of parties; some of which are not a great deal more scrupulous about the purity of their communion than national churches are, while others of them hold the most dangerous errors respecting the faith; denying the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the person and atonement of the Son of God, and almost every thing that is important in the Gospel. It will be a matter of deep regret to all who wish the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, that there should be any parties in the world but *two*, *THEY WHO ARE OF GOD, and they who are of this world**. But will any seri-

* 1 John iv. 4, 5, 6. and v. 19.

ous Christian venture to affirm, that the great diversity of opinion and practice which obtains among various classes of dissenters, is the necessary consequence of withdrawing, if they have withdrawn from fellowship with unbelievers? Surely obedience to an express commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, cannot be a mean of scattering and dividing his sheep; for all his laws, as well as his doctrine, have a direct opposite tendency. A due attention to this law produced the most salutary consequences in the primitive churches; many of the evils which took place among them arose from the neglect of it; and the same causes will infallibly at this day produce the same effects. The corruption of human nature, the temptations of Satan, and the influence of the Man of Sin, who hath his disciples even among those who have separated from national churches, are sufficient to account for all the divisions and animosities that prevail amongst professing Christians.

The question then must necessarily come to this issue. By which party is the rule of the Word of God strictly and conscientiously regarded? Do you see any congregations of Christians, professing the genuine faith of the Gospel, and following the approved example of the churches that were planted by the Apostles of Christ? Of them only it can be justly affirmed, that they avoid all such measures as are truly schismatical, and *fully appear* to belong to that great and honourable party, **THE WHOLE FAMILY OF GOD IN HEAVEN AND EARTH***. For though the order of churches, and a scrupulous attention to all the positive laws of Christ, which have nothing to recommend them but his authority, do not constitute the *essentials* of true religion; yet they form a considerable part of the *evidence* of genuine Christianity, or that which distinguishes the followers of Christ from the world. Every person indeed, who is not self condemned with respect to his religious fellowship, will be partial to his own party, and reckon it superior to any other. But still, among all the various opinions that prevail in relation to this subject, there is a possibility of discerning be-

* Eph. iii, 15.

tween truth and falsehood. The former may with certainty be ascertained, and the latter detected by the Word of God. "To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them *."

The charge of narrow mindedness and bigotry, cannot with justice be brought against those who do not value themselves on any thing that may be reckoned, by other professors, *the badge of a party*, if it is not such a thing as ought, to distinguish all the followers of Christ from the world. We sincerely wish, and pray for the salvation of all men; and feel ourselves bound by the law of Christ, to serve them, both in their temporal and spiritual interests, as we have opportunity. We utterly abhor all persecution for conscience sake, on any pretext whatever; and are so decidedly fixed in our principles against violence in the cause of religion, that if any law were enjoined upon us, which our conviction of duty to God would not suffer us to obey, and if redress were not to be obtained by peaceable remonstrances, our only alternative would be to submit to punishment, or to flee from the impending danger†. We do not burden the consciences of the people of God with standards devised by human wisdom, and enforced by human authority; being fully persuaded, that "all Scripture is written by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works‡." And we impose upon them no terms of communion, except those which are clearly and unalterably fixed by the Word of God. While we condemn as antichristian all religious societies, in which no proper distinction is made between believers and unbelievers; we readily acknowledge that the Gospel is preached by some of their teachers, that many individuals among them are the children of God, and that such are mercifully preserved in this perilous situation,

* Isaiah viii. 20.

† 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20, 21. Mat. v. 38.—42. and x. 23.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. See Appendix No. 2.

and nourished by the Word of God, notwithstanding the countenance which they give to the profanation of divine ordinances. We love them so far as they appear to be of the truth, and are willing to have social intercourse with them in every thing that is not inconsistent with our duty to Christ. If we must be accounted illiberal because we will not sin, I hope it shall be our endeavour, through the strength of divine grace, to bear this reproach with patience, and even to esteem it our honour; for we know that, in far more degrading circumstances, the servants of God have "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus*." We are persuaded however, that the most complete separation from unbelievers, in observing the ordinances of the Gospel, is consistent with the truest liberality of sentiment, and the greatest enlargement of heart; for Paul introduces in this manner, one of the strongest prohibitions against having fellowship with unbelievers, that is to be found in all the New Testament, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged; ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, &c.†"

Without enlarging further on what may be deemed a personal justification, though it proceeds not solely from that motive; I appeal to the Sacred Oracles. By them let all our doctrine be fairly tried, and by their decision let us stand or fall.

IV. I REQUEST your attention to a few practical observations.

1st. In general, we ought to consider the fulfilment of the prophecies respecting those perilous times which were to come in the last days, as a most convincing evidence of the truth of divine revelation. From these prophecies

* Acts v. 41.

† 2 Cor. vi. 11.—15.

there was reason to expect a false profession of the name of Christ in the world; that it would spread very extensively, and continue during the long period of twelve hundred and sixty years*, under the evil auspices of a wicked Power, denominated *the Beast*, or the eight head of Daniel's fourth beast. In one of Daniel's visions, he saw four great beasts, representing four mighty successive empires, which were founded by the Babylonians or Chaldeans, the Medes and Persians, the Grecians, and the Romans. The last of these beasts had ten horns, signifying the ten kingdoms into which the Roman Empire was afterwards divided. "And among them another little horn came up, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. His look was more stout than his fellows†." This is explained by John's vision of "a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns, on which a woman sat, having upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth‡." The same thing is evidently represented by the beast which John saw, and Daniel's fourth beast. Each of them had ten horns, and the eight head of the beast described by John, answers to the little horn mentioned by Daniel. That the empire of Rome was intended, is perfectly clear from its being the fourth and last of those universal monarchies which are described by Daniel, from all that is affirmed of it in this and his other visions, from the explanation given of these in the Revelation of John, and particularly from his pointed and minute description of the seat or throne of this monstrous power. It was a city built on "seven mountains," "that great city which reigned over the kings of the earth||," none of which things could then be affirmed of any city in the world but Rome. The same Power which is represented in these and other prophecies, by the figure of a devouring beast, exercising his tremendous authority in behalf of

* Dan. xii. 7. Rev. xi. 3. and xii. 6, 14.

† Rev. xvii. 3.

‡ Dan. vii. 7, 8, 20.

|| Rev. xvii. 9, 18.

Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and putting to death all who refused to worship him, is elsewhere denominated Antichrist, the Man of Sin, and the Son of Perdition. By him *the mystery of iniquity*, which forms a shocking contrast to THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS, was brought to its maturity and perfection*.

The whole history of the profession of Christianity for many ages past, and particularly from the time of the destruction of the Roman Empire, soon after which the Man of Sin was "revealed," or fully manifested in all his deformity, is an exact fulfilment of these prophecies; some of which describe his exaltation and triumph; and others of them, his gradual downfall, with the circumstances attending it, and the means by which it was to be accomplished. No human sagacity could possibly have foreseen a train of such wonderful events, extending to distant ages, and involving the subjection of many kingdoms to an usurped spiritual Power, which was to maintain its ascendancy for a much longer period than the duration of any other universal Monarchy that had existed in the world; and by means entirely different, in some respects, from those which had been formerly employed for the purpose of subduing and enslaving mankind. The prospect of these things filled the Apostle John himself with the highest astonishment. Speaking of the false church, he says, "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration," or astonishment†. We see also at this day, many of these prophecies fulfilled before our eyes.—The Man of Sin consumed in a great measure by the Spirit of the Lord's mouth, yet maintaining still a high degree of authority in several of the kingdoms of Europe; and his influence in some measure, either directly or indirectly felt throughout the whole of them, as hath been already shown. But in order to obtain that confirmation of our faith which the accomplishment of these predictions ought to produce, it is necessary to form a just es-

* 1 John ii. 18, 22. and iv. 3. 2 Thess ii. 3, 7.

† Rev xvii. 6.

timate of the profession of Christianity which now generally obtains. To those who esteem it *real Christianity*, there can be nothing more stumbling; for all the wickedness that ever man committed, has been perpetrated by multitudes who assumed the Christian name. Whereas, if we admit that they were Christians *only by profession*, then Christianity has nothing to do with their crimes, any further than as its divine origin is proved by their accomplishing the prophetic Scriptures. In proportion as men professing godliness, have sold themselves to commit iniquity, in the same proportion has the Word of God been fulfilled.

What a striking thing is it, that our faith should be strengthened by a survey of the most melancholy scenes that ever took place in the world! Events which seemed to threaten the final overthrow of the Gospel itself, and the total extirpation from the earth, of all its genuine believers!

It would be a happy thing, if professing Christians were disposed to consider, rather in a religious than in a political light, all those calamities which arise from the disputes of contending parties, about worldly power and pre-eminence in particular countries; and the more extensive scenes of human misery in all its forms, that flow from "nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." By all these events the Word of God will be fulfilled, and they will finally issue in the complete destruction of the Man of Sin, and the universal prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. What is the duty, in the mean time, of those who believe the Gospel? Not surely to become parties in a violent struggle to secure, or to obtain the riches, honours, and pleasures of this life; nor, on any pretext whatever, to resist "the powers that are." It is a dangerous thing to intermix religion with politics: those who are much engrossed with the latter, will not in general continue long to regard the former; for the two pursuits are as incompatible as serving God and mammon. If it is true, as I think has been proved, that the kingdom of Christ cannot be promoted by any of those means which are employed in esta-

blishing and defending worldly kingdoms, there is evidently no just pretence for being engaged in keen political disputes, on the score of religion. Nay, I will venture to affirm, that in proportion as you yield to temptations of this kind, your conduct will become a disgrace to your profession. The law of Christ, in the same peremptory manner, prohibits his disciples from asserting their *civil rights* by any violent and forcible means; for it requires them to be subject to kings and rulers, in every country where their lot is cast, without any respect to the nature of the governments under which they live, or the propriety or impropriety of the measures that may be pursued by the civil powers*. The Christians at Rome, who inhabited the very centre of despotism, who had certainly just grounds of complaint against their supreme ruler, the cruel tyrant Nero, and who had been deprived of their ancient constitution and liberties in an arbitrary and lawless manner, were, nevertheless, commanded in the most express terms, "every soul" of them, to "be subject to the higher powers†;" and the unlawfulness of resistance on the part of Christians, is put beyond all doubt by these words, addressed to the same persons; "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation‡," or rather judgment. I will not say that you have no grievances; but whatever these may be, you must be sensible they are not to be named, in comparison with those which the first Christians endured, and that many blessings are secured to you by the mild and auspicious laws of your country, for which they depended on the will of an arbitrary monarch. The obligation therefore, to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake||," must be at least equally binding on you, as it was on them; and you will easily perceive that no man can attempt to shew the opposite, without plainly contradicting the Word of God, either from ignorance of its meaning, or from a desire to prevent it. Besides a great

* Mat. xxii. 21. 1 Tim. i. 1, 2. Tit. iii. 1, 2. 2 Pet. ii. 10.

† Rom. xiii. 1,—8.

‡ Verse 2.

|| 1 Pet. ii. 13,—18.

variety of exhortations which are given to Christians, with respect to all the other relative duties, those which we owe to our civil governors, are inculcated in the New Testament, in no less than seven different places, in some of which, they are dwelt upon at greater length than any thing else of the kind, except the duties which servants owe to their masters. There is something, I doubt not, in human nature, which made this necessary in both cases; and as there is no want of evidence at the present day of the truth of what I now affirm, it is so much the more incumbent on you to give an example in your conduct, of that due subordination which the Word of God inculcates.

2d. ENOUGH has been said to convince you of the necessity of attending to the Word of God, and refusing implicit subjection to any set of men in matters of religion. What immense numbers of the human race have accomplished their own destruction, by following their spiritual guides! They have in many instances been "blind, leaders of the blind; and both have fallen into the ditch*." It is not safe even to follow in all respects those who are reckoned eminent, or who in former times may have been eminent for their faith and holiness. The best men are liable to err, and you ought never to suppose that any sentiment must be right, or that any thing is a duty, merely because the one was held, and the other practised, by eminent saints, or great divines. The antiquity of certain principles and practices, is no recommendation to them, unless you can trace them back to the days of the Apostles, and clearly establish them from the doctrine which they taught, and the conduct which they approved. It would save a great deal of trouble, and prevent the danger of falling into many errors, if people, instead of searching the works of the primitive fathers, in order to sanction their systems of divinity, would apply at once to the New Testament; which, besides being divinely inspired, has a higher claim to antiquity, and is more simple, and easy to be understood. I

* Mat. xv. 14.

do not question that some things recorded in the New Testament, may be illustrated and confirmed by the writings of those who lived near the time of the Apostles; but whatever is found in the latter, and not in the former, must go for nothing, in the opinion of all those who tremble at the Word of God.

From any accounts that have been transmitted to us of the times immediately after the Apostles, there is no great reason to boast of their purity. The churches soon began to depart from the original simplicity of the institutions of Christ, and gave many proofs both of superstition and self-righteousness. They suffered their teachers to assume a degree of power and pre-eminence, totally inconsistent with humility and self-denial, which so well become the followers of Christ. They raised the elders of churches to the dignities of diocesan and metropolitan bishops; and thus prepared the way for that fatal dominion of the clergy, which enabled them to enslave and persecute the people of God, and almost to annihilate the true profession of the name of Christ in the world. They introduced philosophy into the Christian system, and darkened the simple revelation of the Gospel by the wisdom of the schools. It does not appear however, that the first churches had in general many wicked characters among them, till long after the time of the Apostles. On the contrary, they frequently went beyond the rule of the Word of God, in delaying to admit new converts, as well as persons who had been excommunicated, and who seemed deeply to repent of their wicked conduct. This again arose from their having corrupted the doctrine of the Gospel. They were not sufficiently aware, that they themselves could only live by free and sovereign mercy, and therefore they refused to have compassion on their fellow sinners.

The more we examine the writings of men, and the practice of churches, the more will we see the absolute necessity of regulating our own sentiments and conduct by the Word of God alone. We ought not even to follow, in all respects, the example of those churches, whose history is

recorded by inspired men; for they give us a faithful account of their crimes, as well as their virtues. And if it is necessary to observe what parts of *their* conduct were approved, and corresponded with the doctrine of the Apostles, before we can be warranted to follow them; it must be still more necessary to compare with the same rule, the doctrine and practice of the most eminent fathers, and the most ancient and renowned churches. Indeed, if this sentiment had not prevailed at the time of THE REFORMATION, the world would still have been sunk in Popish darkness, superstition, and idolatry. It is only to be regretted, that THE REFORMERS, great and beneficial as their labours were, did not consistently adhere to it in all respects: for *they* also pleaded the authority of the fathers, and established human standards of Christian faith and practice.

3d. I WOULD exhort you, my brethren, who know the nature of Messiah's kingdom, who have been delivered from antichristian delusions, and made partakers of those privileges which were enjoyed by the first churches, to retain a deep sense of the evils you have escaped, and the blessings which you now enjoy. Shew this, by keeping at a distance from every thing that would endanger your returning, even in your hearts, to Babylon. "Touch not the unclean thing;" and remember, that with this the Lord connects these comfortable words, "I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, &c."

Consider also, I beseech you, how much reason you have to regret the misimprovement or abuse of privileges. Have you been all this while "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" Have you sufficiently made it to appear, that you were not barren nor unfruitful in this excellent knowledge, by its producing in your hearts and lives, all those practical effects which are attributed to it in the Word of God? Are none of you become lukewarm, indifferent about the awfully important concerns of eternity, and insensible to those benefits which you might obtain, by attending to the ordinances with that

fervency of soul which becomes redeemed sinners? We are more free from gross and scandalous sins, from dangerous errors in doctrine, and from outward irregularities in conducting our worship, than some of the first churches were. But alas! we come far short of them, in the enjoyment that many of them had of the love of God, and the hope of eternal life, in their self-denial, and mortification to this world, their fervent love one to another, their humility, meekness, and patience under sufferings*. While they were "in heaviness through manifold trials, they rejoiced" in the prospect of the heavenly inheritance, "with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Our separation from the world, therefore, though it is both a privilege and a duty, furnishes us with no pretext for glorying over other men. It is a most humbling consideration, that we have been separated to so little purpose; and ought, I am persuaded, to lead every one of us to deep repentance. Perhaps, it cannot be said with truth, that all of you are as much exercised to godliness, in every respect, as many of those whose ignorance you profess to pity. Will not this provoke you to emulation? Are you not ashamed to give to the world around you, such a mean and unworthy example of the influence of those sublime principles which you profess to hold?

Beware of treating with indignity and contempt, those who may differ from you about the things of which I have been speaking; especially when you have any reason to think that they are taught of God to know the truth as it is in Jesus. Instruct them with meekness, as they are able to bear it; admonish them with tenderness and affection; and make it evident by the whole of your deportment, that you have nothing in view but the good of their souls. At the same time, yield none of the sayings of Christ to their prejudices, or aversion: maintain with unshaken firmness, and in its own due place, every thing that you have learned from the word of God. Even when on proper occasions

* These opposite things are affirmed of different persons. Dangerous errors in doctrine, and indulging in gross sins, are totally incompatible with the enjoyment of the love of God, and the hope of eternal life.

you represent the extreme wickedness of a false and corrupt profession of Christianity, of which it is our duty to speak, when called to it, with the utmost plainness; avoid every indiscreet and abusive manner of speech; and imitate, in all your expressions, the serious, solemn, and dignified language of the Word of God.

4th. I SHALL now use the freedom to address myself to you who believe the Gospel, and enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; but have not yet turned away from outward nominal professors, nor connected yourselves with the churches of the saints. You have heard some account of the perils of the latter days, and the obligations you are under, as having received mercy, to be closely united with your brethren in Christ Jesus, and to acknowledge none as such, but those who "are of the truth, and hear Christ's voice." You will judge of the truth or falsehood of all that I have spoken: I presume not to dictate to your consciences. But remember, that whatever judgment you now form, you will be accountable for it at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. You are in danger of being led aside by the error of the wicked, by the prejudices arising from education and habit, by respect for the opinions of those whom you have been taught to venerate, and by the fear of reproach, which they who make a singular profession of the name of Christ have reason to expect. You have need therefore, to examine the Word of God with much care and diligence, and to pray earnestly for his enlightening Spirit, that you may be led into all truth, and made willing to yield obedience to that which you already know.

Give no ear to that principle which many have espoused, 'That a number of the laws which Jesus Christ hath given to his churches, are of little or no consequence; that we may be very good Christians without obeying them; and that, in order to our having fellowship with all the people of God, of whatever denomination, it is necessary and proper that we should act in opposition to some things, which

we acknowledge are the commandments of the Lord.' One would think the mere stating of this principle, would be sufficient to render it odious in the eyes of all who fear God. Some things undoubtedly, in distinction from others, are "the great and weightier matters of the law." But does not Jesus say, with respect to BOTH, "*these* ought ye to have done, and not to leave *the other* undone*?" And on another occasion he says, "whosoever shall break *one of these least commandments*, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven†." When recommending, by his own example, one of those offices of brotherly love, which, though it should be necessary on particular occasions, some would consider as trifling, and others as degrading, he also says, "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them‡." No divine commandment ought to be reckoned of small importance, though some, in comparison with others, may be called the least. Nor is there any Christian principle more clearly established than this, that the disciples of Christ are bound to do *all things* whatsoever he hath commanded them. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," because he resists the authority of THE GREAT AND ONLY LAWGIVER, "who is able to save, and to destroy||."

When we read of the disobedience of the first man, we see nothing more than a transgression, exactly familiar to those which are avowed by many serious professing Christians. What immorality was there in eating the forbidden fruit? None surely, except what arose from the divine prohibition. Yet this law was enforced by an awful sanction, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die**." The sentence was executed: all men die; all derive a corrupt nature from apostate Adam; and, on account of their own sins, are exposed to everlasting punishment. I am not speaking to infidels, who would scoff at these things: I know that you believe them. This signal display of the

* Mat. xxii. 23.

† Mat. v. 19.

‡ John xiii. 12.—18.

|| James ii. 10. and iv. 12.

** Gen. ii. 16, 17.

Divine vengeance against what some call a trivial offence, ought therefore to deter you from hearkening to the lie of Satan, who says, "Ye shall not surely die.*"

Perhaps some of you may plead, that you are bound, in the judgment of charity, to consider the persons with whom you walk in the fellowship of the Gospel, as real Christians; or at least, that though many of them give little evidence of this by their conduct, yet you are not warranted positively to judge them as unbelievers. It is difficult to reason on a matter of this kind, with those who have no fixed sentiments about the proper evidences of genuine Christianity. I am far from wishing you to form a harsh and unwarrantable judgment. But surely those things which distinguish believers from unbelievers, are not all of a negative kind. Real Christians must be expected to give some positive evidences of their faith in Christ. They will shew by their conversation, that they understand and love the Gospel; they will conscientiously perform every moral duty, and also keep those sayings of Christ which have nothing to recommend them but his authority, so far as they are instructed in the knowledge of them. They will in a particular manner attend to the duties of brotherly love, by which the disciples of Christ are known to one another, and to all men†." Well then, are all the persons with whom you walk in religious fellowship of this description? Can you say in truth and sincerity, whether you belong to the national church, or to others which are similar in their constitution, and have adopted her standards, that the churches of which you are members are "in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ;" and that it is proper to denominate them "habitations of God through the Spirit, the Temples of the living God‡?" Do you really believe, that the individuals of which they are composed are "beloved of God, called to be saints, faithful brethren in Christ Jesus," and those who are "called by God the Fa-

* Gen. iii. 4

† John xiii. 34, 35. 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

‡ 1 Thess. i. 1. Eph. ii. 22. 2 Cor. vi. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

ther to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord *?" If they are not entitled to these appellations, in what respects do they resemble the primitive churches, which were thus described? And if they are quite a different kind of churches, how can you think it a duty incumbent on you to continue in their communion?

It has been admitted that the people of God are in that Babylon, which is the antitype of the ancient city of this name, in which the children of Israel were held in captivity. They are in the great city itself, and in all her distant provinces, which in a greater or less degree imitate her iniquitous conduct. But, I beseech you to observe, that the word of God does not promise them perfect safety and consolation there. The ancient people of God, when they dwelt in the capital of Chaldea, and in some of its provinces, felt themselves in bondage, and had no happiness or comfort, but in the prospect of returning to Zion. "They sat down by the rivers of Babylon; they wept when they remembered Zion; they hanged their harps upon the willows;" and, in answer to the insulting demands of their enemies, they said, "how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy†." I doubt not you have often had feelings of the same kind, though you might not so perfectly know the cause of your bondage and distress. Can you expect peace or security, while you are at a distance from your Father's house, and captives in a foreign land? But, which is still worse, you are willing captives, and refuse to be set at liberty. The Lord hath broken that Power which kept his people in spiritual bondage. He hath "appeared in his glory, building up Zion, hearing the prayer of the destitute, and not despising their prayer‡." But while he is "turning again the captivity of Zion, you are like them that dream§." You can scarce-

* Rom. i. 7. 1 Cor i. 2, 9. Col. i. 2.

† Psal. cii. 16, 17, 18.

‡ Psal. cxxxvii. 1,—7.

§ Psal. cxxvi. 1.

ly believe that there is any reality in what you see: your minds are full of darkness and confusion, and you know not where to turn yourselves for comfort and relief. In the mean time, the voice from heaven which calls you to make your escape, waxes louder and louder; and providence concurs with the prophetic Scriptures, in warning you that the time draws nigh, when another voice shall be heard, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen*!" You have now many opportunities of knowing your duty, beyond those who lived in former ages, when the Man of Sin was in the zenith of his power. What excuse then can you plead for living in a state of carnal security, and listless inactivity, amidst those great and imminent dangers to which you are exposed? I am persuaded, that when the final destruction of Babylon comes, the Lord's people will be kept in safety, not by being preserved there, but by their hearing his voice, and being delivered from all connection with anti-christian societies. It was in this manner that the disciples of Christ were saved from that destruction which came upon the city of Jerusalem: they made their escape from it, in the faith of what our Lord had prophesied, and in obedience to his express commandment†."

If you will not be moved by these terrors of the Lord, allow me to beseech you by his mercies. Do you really enjoy the forgiveness of sin, through the atonement of the Son of God? Hath "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his abundant mercy, begotten you again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?" And will you disregard any thing that he hath spoken? Ought not "the love of Christ to constrain you, because you thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again‡? Are you not convinced in you own minds, that it is none of the effects of genuine and fervent love, to consider *how little* of his

* Rev. xiv. 6, 7, 8.

† Mat. xxiv. 15,—19.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

will you may obey, and yet be in a state of safety? Love will dispose you to “ shew forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,” and minutely to enquire what is the will of Christ in every particular, that you may obey it. Either the entire neglect of the commandments of Christ, or a long continued hesitation about putting them in practice, is not very consistent with the powerful, operative, and constraining principle of love. “ This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous*.” And Christ says, “ if ye love me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings†.”

I shall conclude with the following words of the Apostle John, which have an immediate reference to the subjects we have been considering ; for some of these subjects occupy a great part of the book of the Revelation. “ Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND‡.”

*1 John v. 3.

† John xiv. 15, 21, 24.

‡ Rev. i. 3.

A P P E N D I X.

No. I.

Thoughts on the Weekly Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

It may be useful to give a brief summary of the scriptural evidence, which confirms the assertion in the First Discourse, page 16, that the primitive Christians observed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week.

The words of our Lord at the institution of this ordinance, do not positively ascertain *how often* it ought to be celebrated by his disciples. The only thing that points at this, is what he said concerning the cup*, “ This do ye, *as oft* as ye drink it in remembrance of me;” and in the Apostle Paul's observation which accompanies this, “ for *as often* as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come †.” As professing Christians generally wish for some latitude in matters of this kind, many of them have supposed, from these expressions, that the frequency of the Lord's Supper is discretionary on their part, and that Christ and his Apostles have left them at liberty to attend to it, as often, or as seldom as they find it convenient. The consequence has been, that in all the congregations belonging to the Church of Scotland, and in many dissenting congregations, they observe it only once, or at

* 1 Cor. xi. 25.

† Verse 26.

most, twice in the year. According to their own principles, however, they need not keep this ordinance more frequently than once in seven years, if they should so incline. This alone is sufficient to convince all who seriously wish to know their duty, that it is not probable at least, that a matter of such importance would be left on a footing so exceedingly vague and undetermined. But supposing it were altogether optional and voluntary on our part, whether would a grateful and affectionate remembrance of the love of Christ in giving his life a ransom for many, and an earnest desire of enjoying the blessings signified in this ordinance, induce us to keep it every Lord's day, or once in twelve months? The answer that cannot fail to be given to this question by all the genuine disciples of Christ, will nearly settle the point in dispute.

This point ought to be fully determined by the example of the churches that were planted by the Apostles, and there is very complete evidence that they partook of the Lord's Supper, every first day of the week. We are informed concerning the church at Jerusalem*, that "they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers." Did they continue stedfastly in "the breaking of bread," which is just another name for the Lord's Supper, used also in Acts xx, 7, if they only partook of it two or three times in the year? No person would venture to affirm, that *in this manner* they continued stedfastly in "the Apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, and the prayers." How then can this be reckoned a stedfast continuance in an ordinance, which was intended as a perpetual remembrancer of the Lord's death, until he come again? So convincing has this passage appeared to some, that they have run, only in

* Acts ii. 42.

theory indeed, to the opposite extreme, and maintained, that the first Christians observed this ordinance on other days besides Lord's day; perhaps always when they were publicly met for prayer, and hearing the doctrine of the Apostles. There is no instance however, in all the New Testament, of any church eating the Lord's Supper, except on the first day of the week; for the other expression, "breaking bread from house to house," is explained by their "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*," which evidently refers to their common meals†. The sacred historian therefore, must be understood as describing the practice of the church at Jerusalem *on the first day of the week*, when he says, they continued stedfastly in the breaking of bread. Though they had many other meetings for public worship, that was the only day on which they had an opportunity of observing *all* the ordinances of the Lord Jesus, and they neglected none of them. *On that day* they were assembled, when they received the promise of the Holy Spirit, for it was the fiftieth day from the day on which the sheaf of the first fruits was waved before the Lord, which last happened that year on the Jewish Sabbath, and that Sabbath day was, on this account, called by the Jews an high day‡. As they began the observation of these ordinances on the Lord's day, so they continued stedfastly in them every succeeding first day of the week. It appears also, that when the church at Corinth "came together into one place," that is, as I understand it, on the first day of the week, one principal thing that they had in view, was "to eat the Lord's Supper||." Another very express example of this, is recorded in the

* Acts ii. 46.

† The Lord's Supper, and an ordinary meal, or a feast of charity, are likewise both termed "breaking bread," in Acts xx. 7, 11.

‡ John xix. 31. See Lev. xxiii. 10,—17.

|| 1 Cor. xi. 20. See

also chap. xvi. 2.

twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them*." Does not every one perceive, that the very intention of the church at Troas, in coming together on the first day of the week, or the chief design of it, was to break bread in remembrance of the death of Christ; and that even the preaching of the Apostle Paul is mentioned as a secondary consideration? This simple narration of facts is decisive, and as clearly proves the weekly celebration of the Lord's supper, as if the sacred historian had affirmed it in the most unequivocal terms. On the other hand, it is equally plain that they did not keep this ordinance on any other day; for the Apostle had been at Troas from the preceding Monday, the time of his residence there being in all seven days†. He seems to have tarried so long, for this purpose among others, that he might have an opportunity of joining with the church in this comfortable ordinance, on the appointed day. This he did, notwithstanding his anxiety to get forward on his journey; and that some urgent cause made him anxious to proceed, appears by his departing at the break of day, after a sleepless night; for "he continued his speech till midnight; and when he had eaten, and talked a long while even till break of day, so he departed‡."

There is no clearer example for keeping the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, than for observing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on that day; and it will be admitted, that the authority for the former chiefly depends on the approved example of the first Christians, which is recorded for our imitation. I do not mean the setting apart of one day in seven for the immediate service of God. The obligation of this duty is founded on the original sanctifica-

* Acts xx. 7.

† Verse 6.

‡ Verse 7, 11.

tion of the seventh day, on which God rested from his work of creation; and on the fourth commandment of the moral law, delivered by Moses. The great and powerful motives that are presented to us in the Gospel, enforce the observance of another day, for which this additional reason is given, that Christ hath entered into his rest, having ceased from his own works, as God did from his*. But the disciples of Christ require satisfactory evidence, that the same authority by which the seventh-day-Sabbath was appointed, and abrogated as a part of the Jewish system, for in this point of view it was a shadow of things to come†; now obliges them to sanctify *the Lord's day*, and to keep it holy. If the example of the first Christians, under the direction of the inspired Apostles, is sufficient for this purpose, why should not the example of their eating the Lord's Supper on that day, be admitted as equally binding on the churches of Christ? There is not, in all the New Testament, any one specified instance of a church being assembled for divine worship on the first day of the week, who did not meet for this among other purposes, that they might commemorate the death of Christ in the ordinance of the Supper. That authority therefore, which has distinguished one Christian Sabbath from another, and made some of them, in comparison of the rest, *high days*, cannot plead the Word of God for its foundation. Every Lord's day is a day of exultation and triumph, to those who enjoy the hope of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and it is fit that on all such days, they should commemorate, in the appointed way, the grand foundation of this blessed hope.

It would not be at all surprising, though some loose professors should begin to argue in the same way against keep-

* Heb. iv. 3,—11.

† Coloss. ii. 16, 17.

ing the Christian Sabbath. 'The primitive churches,' they might say, 'met sometimes on the first day of the week; but perhaps this was only once or twice in the year, or as often as they found it convenient; for it is not affirmed in any part of the New Testament, that this was their constant regular practice, every Lord's day.' Such persons would be justly reckoned irreligious and profane: but how would we confute them? I suppose, by affirming that the few instances which are left on record, of the first Christians observing the ordinances on the Lord's day, are examples to us of what their practice was on every such day. And is it not equally proper, that we should regard a few specified instances of their *breaking bread* on that day, as a sufficient proof that they always did so?

Thus it is clearly established, that the churches of Christ ought to keep the ordinance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week; and it is remarkable, that all the arguments which have been used against this practice, when they are duly considered, tend only to illustrate and confirm the obligations which render it the indispensable duty of the people of God.

No. II.

Thoughts on the Nature and Tendency of Human Standards of Religion.

IN the third discourse, page 64, it is affirmed, that there ought to be no other standard of religion among Christians, than the Word of God. It is certainly, however, not sufficient that either teachers, or members of Christian churches, should in general terms profess their belief of THE SCRIPTURES. Many do so, who neither understand the Gospel,

nor keep the sayings of Christ. But how is this to be remedied? Not by requiring people to sign *human standards*, for these are as little believed as the other, by many who subscribe them; and they cannot be more clearly, and decisively expressed than the holy Scriptures. The churches of Christ must be capable to judge what doctrine is contained in the Word of God, otherwise they could not be certain whether human confessions and catechisms, were agreeable to it or not. What good purpose then can be answered, by the strange expedient of making, or adopting an *imperfect standard*, when they are already in possession of one that is ABSOLUTELY PERFECT? They can only know the faith of those who apply to them for admission, by hearing them profess it in distinct and intelligible words, and by the evidence which their conduct affords, that they have "received the love of the truth." They judge, in the best manner they can, how far these agree with the Word of Truth which God himself hath spoken, and with the effects produced by it on those who first believed it. If this is not fairly and openly submitted to the judgment of all the members, what proper scriptural evidence can they have, that unbelievers are not received into their communion? And with respect to their teachers, if they follow the primitive example of chusing them from among themselves, they will be perfectly acquainted both with their sentiments and conduct*.

Some wish to get rid of human standards, because they contain *too much* of the doctrine of the Scriptures; and others, because they do not in all respects exactly correspond with it. In fact, every honest man who disbelieves the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and every sincere believer, who is

* Acts ii. 21. to the end. Chap. vi. 3, 5. Chap. xiv. 23. Tit. i. 5,—19.

sufficiently scrupulous about maintaining the truth in its original purity, will object against creeds and confessions, *when they are made standards of faith*; and it is only in this point of view, that I presume to censure the whole of them without exception. A mere confession of faith, or a declaration of the sentiments held by any particular body of Christians, is an innocent thing. It may not be free of errors and imperfections, but no one is bound to assent to it as a term of communion: nothing is proposed by it but information and instruction. The evil which I complain of, is, that of making any human production whatever, a standard of divine faith, and of the duties which we owe to God.

Human standards are not merely useless: they are also hurtful, and dangerous. It will be admitted, that there exists a possibility at least of being led into error by the very best of them: for some numerous and respectable bodies in this country, which have long adhered to the standards of the national church, have lately begun to question the authority of some things contained in them: and, this being the case, how can they know with certainty that errors do not still remain undiscovered? Christians are too apt to err on many occasions, by departing from the perfect rule of faith and practice, which the Lord himself hath given them; but how great must be the danger of those, whose very standards are erroneous! The Word of God is not merely *a rule*, but THE ONLY RULE by which the sentiments, inclinations, and conduct of all men ought to be regulated, and by which they will be judged in the last day*. It contains the most awful threatnings against those who shall add to it, or take any thing away from it†; and, far

* Psal. xix. 7,—12. John xii. 48. Rom. ii. 16.

† Pro. xxx. 6. Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

from delegating to any class of men a power to form additional standards, there are few things against which it more frequently cautions us, than the danger of following any rule but itself, or submitting to the authority of man in the things of God*. Nay, it declares, that many would be seduced from the faith by corrupt and deceitful teachers, who would arrogantly assume the power of making laws for the disciples of Christ†. Indeed, if it is admitted that we have a divine revelation at all, it necessarily follows that no man, or body of men, whatever may be their gifts, their knowledge of the Scriptures, and their pretensions to sanctity, if they are not divinely inspired, can be warranted to make any standard in addition to that which it contains: and it will be acknowledged by all whom I mean to address, that divine revelation ceased with the Apostles.

It is pleaded by those who favour human confessions of faith, that they are 'founded on the Holy Scriptures, and agreeable thereto.' Nay, some of their standards maintain, while they are in the very act of establishing *another rule*, that 'the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are *the only rule* of faith and manners!' The same formularies which require the assent of probationers, ministers, and elders, to this grand and incontrovertible truth, oblige them also to declare, that 'they sincerely own and believe *the whole doctrine* contained in the Confession of Faith, larger and shorter catechisms, compiled by the Assembly of Divines that met at Westminster, to be founded on the Word of God;' and that 'they resolve, through divine grace,

* Mat. xv. 3,—10. Gal. i. 8, 9. Eph. iv. 14. Col. ii. 8, 9, 10, 18. 2 Thess. ii. 15. 2 Tim. iii. 13, to iv. 5.

† Acts xx. 30, 31, 32. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2. Dan. vii. 25. 2 Thess. ii. 4, 10, 11, 12. Rev. xiii. 8, 12, 15, 16, 17.

firmly and constantly to adhere to it, and to assert, maintain, and defend it, to the utmost of their power, against all errors and opinions contrary to it.' Could any words express a more unqualified assent to a *human rule* of faith and manners, or impose a more solemn obligation to maintain and defend it? Yet all men of sound principles are not convinced, that the whole of its doctrine is consonant to the Holy Scriptures. And at any rate, the indecency of requiring from Christian teachers, a solemn profession of their faith in the writings of fallible men, might easily be discerned by all who venerate divine revelation, and pay a due respect to the rights of conscience.

If any human standards agree entirely with the Word of God, it is evident that the same thing cannot be justly affirmed of the whole of them; for they do not perfectly correspond with one another. And all the ingenuity of man is incapable to make it appear, that the leaders in this business are fully persuaded of the sufficiency of the Scriptures. If the Word of God is a perfect and infallible standard, it must for this very reason be **THE EXCLUSIVE ONE**; and when it is not really and consistently held as the only rule of faith and practice, it is impossible in the nature of the thing, that it can be considered as completely sufficient, in all respects, for this purpose. Those who adopt *another rule*, must undoubtedly reckon it deficient, either with respect to the matter which it contains, the order in which its doctrine is delivered, or the simplicity, clearness, and precision, with which it states every thing that is necessary to regulate the faith and practice of Christians. So far as any person is satisfied with the Scriptures in all these particulars, in the same proportion will he doubt the propriety of human standards; unless he is resolved to maintain, that it is needful to add something to *that which is perfect*;

—a position so absurd, that it would be an affront to the human understanding to offer any argument against it.

Is there no danger in thus lessening the authority of the Word of God, and exalting that of synods, councils, and assemblies of uninspired men? Has it no tendency to palm their sentiments on mankind as *divine truths*, when you denominate them tests and standards of the Christian faith; make an assent to them a term of communion, at least of what is called ministerial communion; and refer to them as decisive in all matters of church-discipline and government, and sometimes in controversies about points of divinity? Is it possible, in these respects, to pay a higher degree of deference to the Word of God itself? Will the disciples of Christ examine the Scriptures with candour, and receive all their information concerning the things of God, immediately from that unerring source of knowledge, while such a formidable barrier stands in their way? Or can it be supposed that those who duly venerate the holy Scriptures, will subscribe, or assent to the works of men, in such a way as to give a tacit acknowledgment of their perfection, *without some remorse of conscience*? For certainly those standards which contain *the rule and measure of our duty to God*, ought to be ABSOLUTELY PERFECT.

It would require a volume, to show the evils which arise from human standards of religion. THE REFORMERS in the sixteenth century did a most essential service to mankind, when they were made the instruments in the hand of God of bringing the Scriptures to light, and publishing them in the different languages of the nations, after they had been long withheld by *the Man of Sin*. But they prevented the full effect of that light which might have been expected to proceed from the Word of God, by placing human standards of doctrine between it and the people; and

their example has been hitherto faithfully imitated by Protestants, of almost all denominations. These *uninspired traditions of the fathers*, are not however now held in such high veneration as they formerly were. The light of DIVINE TRUTH is gradually dispelling the darkness and prejudice, which they have been the means of perpetuating to this day; and all the exertions of their most zealous defenders, can only procure them a feeble assent. Sooner or later, *they must sink into oblivion*; but "THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOR EVER*."

* Isa. xl. 8.